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People & the Planet

Volume 7 Number 3

THE GIRL CHILD

Front cover: Girl student at an *ashram*, Madhya Pradesh, India
Credit: Sanjeev Saith
Left: Girls at prayer, Abhydaya Ashram, Madhya Pradesh, India
Credit: Sanjeev Saith

People & the Planet

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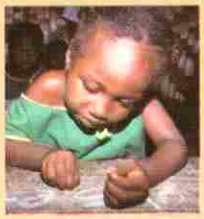

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Judgement Day

There are many striking insights into the world of the girl child at the close of the 20th century in this issue of *People & the Planet*. Globally, the picture is one of some progress. Over the past 40 years the proportion of children in school has doubled, despite the huge increase in population – and girls' enrollment has been as fast as that of boys, almost closing the gender gap in some developing countries. And, since the world conferences on population and development in Cairo in 1994, and on women in Beijing in 1995, there has been an effort by some governments, non-government organisations and the World Bank to invest in the education of girls. Some efforts have also been made to pass laws to protect girls from discrimination and the appalling incidence of violence, trafficking and sexual abuse. But overall, the situation remains a sad and daunting one, especially in Africa and South Asia.

A few facts stand out. In Sub-Saharan Africa, after a big effort to increase primary school enrollment, progress has stalled and in some countries the actual numbers at school have gone down while population is growing fast. As a result, the total number of out-of-school children in the region is projected to double from 41 million in 1990 to 83 million in 2015 – including 45 million girls. In South Asia, where half the battle for girls' education is being fought, the outlay on all education is a mere 3.5 per cent of government spending. Globally, girls make up 60 per cent of the 140 million children who do not even make it to primary school – and two-thirds of the 100 hundred million who drop out of school.

Equally worrying is the growing imbalance of girls and boys in some societies – especially in Asia – as a result of sex-selected abortion, infanticide and neglect. The Cairo Conference called for the elimination of the excess mortality of girls, but in China, for example, the latest figure puts the ratio near to 120 males to 100 females, indicating the urgency of new approaches to reproductive health care now being bravely attempted in co-operation with the UN Population Fund and others (see page 32). In India, the latest survey puts girl mortality in the 0-4 age group 43 per cent higher for girls than for boys, with another upswing in the 15-19 age group as teenage mothers die from causes relating to pregnancy and childbirth. As Professor Fathalla comments, many will be called into account on Judgement Day for what they have done to millions of girls and many more will have to answer for doing so little to help them.

John Rowley

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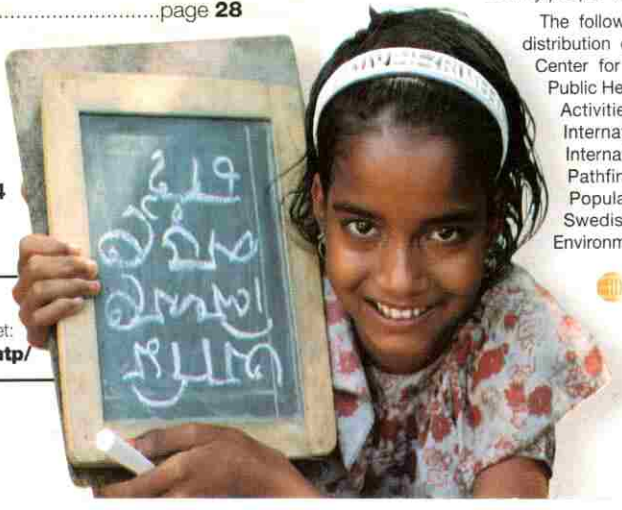
The following 'associates' are partners in the development and distribution of *People & the Planet:* AVSC International, Audubon, Center for Communication Programs, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Earthwatch, Centre for Development and Population Activities, Family Health International, Futures Group, International Institute for Environment and Development, International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, Pathfinder International, Population Action International, Population Concern, Population Reference Bureau, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Television Trust for the Environment, WWF-Alliance for Religions and Conservation.



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newsfile

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LOST WORLD

An international group of scientists are set to explore a lost world more than two miles below the surface of Antarctica in search of new life forms. Scientists have likened the expedition to that of landing on another planet.

In an unprecedented mission planned for around 2001, scientists will penetrate through 2½ miles of ice to investigate a vast lake roughly the size of Lake Ontario that has been buried by ice for millions of years.

Lake Vostok is the largest of 70 lakes under Antarctica's surface. No one is actually sure how these lakes were formed but scientists believe that they developed under pressure from the ice sheet above and that hot-water vents on the lake bed have prevented the water from freezing.

Initial probing to within a few hundred feet of Lake Vostok has uncovered unusual microbes new to science. "We've found some really bizarre things – things that we have never seen before. We're exploring a new world" said astrophysicist, Richard Hoover of NASA, the American Space Agency.

Drilling has stopped because scientists now face the problem of penetrating the 4 km-thick ice sheet without contaminating its pristine waters with life from above.

At a meeting in St Petersburg in March to discuss technology and equipment, Dr Cyan Ellis-Evans of the British Antarctic Survey said that researchers will cut deeper into the ice using a hot water lance. A heated sterile probe will then be lowered, sterilising itself as it descends. The ice will freeze again around it. When the "cryobot" reaches the water, it will release a "hydrobot" which will explore the aquatic environment of the lake. "We are expecting to find new things he said – and yes, it is like going to another planet."

Scientists from NASA see this project as way of test-driving the drilling equipment which it hopes to send to another mysterious body of water trapped under miles of ice on Jupiter's moon, Europa. The discovery that life on Earth can exist for hundreds of thousands of years in the most inhospitable place raises hopes for the possibility of finding extraterrestrial life under the ice of Europa or Mars.

Contact: Linda Capper, BAS Press and Information Office, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge CB3 0ET, UK.
Tel: + 44 (0)1223 221 448, Fax: + 44 (0)1223 302093, Email: L.Capper@bas.ac.uk

NUTRITION NEWS

Malnutrition is a factor in more than half of all child deaths worldwide, yet three-quarters of the children who die show few or no outward signs, reports the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) *1998 State of the World's Children.*

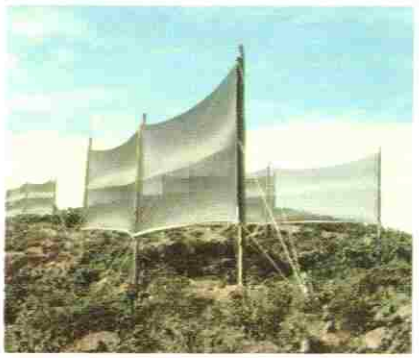
Malnutrition is mainly a consequence of disease and inadequate dietary intake. It can take a variety of forms that contribute to each other, such as protein-energy malnutrition and deficiencies of micronutrients like iodine, iron and Vitamin A. According to the UNICEF report, many more elements are involved, including discrimination against women, which result in women eating last and least, and in being denied the educational opportunities that would empower them to better care for themselves and for their children.

"Good nutrition relies on a combination of adequate nutritious food, good health services and proper care for both children and pregnant women," says Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF.

However, the report says that recent breakthroughs in nutritional science could have untold benefits. There is growing evidence that better nutrition in early childhood and during pregnancy may reduce heart disease, diabetes and other chronic ailments in latter life. Research also shows that simple measures – such as ensuring that children eat breakfast and have adequate intake of micronutrients such as iron and iodine – can improve school performance.

Vitamin A, found in such foods as eggs, butter, whole milk and liver also has a profound effect on child health. Studies show that deaths from diarrhoea can be reduced by 35 to 40 per cent if children are given Vitamin A supplements. Other research shows that Vitamin A could halve the number of deaths among children suffering from measles.

A study in Nepal shows that Vitamin A supplements can also reduce pregnancy deaths dramatically, while another study in Malawi concludes that Vitamin A-deficient women were four-and-half times more likely to pass the HIV/AIDS virus on to their children than those with adequate Vitamin A levels in their blood.



Robert S. Schermeauer

For a copy of the report contact:
Stacey Adams, UNICEF UK Press Office, London, UK. Tel: +44 (0) 171 430 0162.
Or, Angela Hawke, UNICEF Division of Communications, New York, USA.
Tel: (+1 212) 326 7506

COLLECTING FOG

The ever-increasing demand for fresh water has drawn attention to one of the least known water sources – fog.

In fact, it seems that for at least 2,000 years, local communities have found ways of collecting water from fog. Pliny referred to the Fountain Tree on the island of El Hierra in the Canary Islands and locals continued to obtain much of their water from the fog that dripped from the their trees right up until at least 1800.

Now the harvesting of fog water, as clouds drift over the hillsides of arid lands, is becoming a serious business, with important benefits for local villagers.

A simple fog collector made of a frame that supports a section of mesh held in a vertical plane, with a plastic trough to collect the water and pipes taking the water to a cistern, can cost as little as $100. And a large collector can produce between 150 and 750 litres of water a day.

One village on the northern coast of Chile, Chungungo, completed a pipeline from a series of 75 collectors in 1992 and now collects some 11,000 litres a day, enough to provide each of the 340 inhab-

itants with more than 30 litres a day of high quality water. It has changed their lives and is much preferred to the water previously trucked in.

Other projects, some supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), are in place in Peru, Ecuador, Namibia, Oman and Nepal.

Source: *Tiempo*, issue 26, published by IIED in London. The first International Conference on Fog and Fog Collection will take place in Vancouver, Canada in July. Contact Sherry Kornblum, Environmental Communications International, PO Box 81541, 1057 Steeles Ave, West North York, Ontario M2R 2 X1, Canada. Fax: (+1 416) 739 4211, Email: robert.schemenauer@ec.gc.ca

HOTTING UP

The Earth's climate *is* getting warmer. Three out of the past eight years (1990, 1995 and 1997) have been the hottest recorded since 1400 and rise in temperatures can be firmly linked to man-made causes, say British and American Scientists.

The research published in *Nature* in April shows that while natural events such as volcanoes, changes in solar radiation and El Niño have influenced weather patterns for the past 500 years, temperature rise in the 20th century has been caused by increased concentrations of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide.

Professor Michael Mann of the University of Massachusetts who led the report said: "The anomalous warmth of several recent years appears likely to be related to human influences on climate."

An examination of a whole range of indicators to chart annual temperature patterns over the past 600 years, including tree rings, coral growth, polar-ice cores, ice melt and rainfall, as well as historical data, shows that the northern hemisphere has been its warmest since the Middle Ages.

Phillip Jones of the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia commenting on the research said: "The data shows that the most dramatic change in temperature has come in the 20th century: it's higher than in the past six centuries."

- The first three months of 1998 were the warmest period of the this length ever recorded for the world, according to the Hadley Centre for Climate Predication and Research in England.

COUNTING THE COST

The Indonesian forest fires of 1997 resulted in over US$3 billion in damages, according to a study by the Economy and Environment Program for South East Asia (EEPSEA) and the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF). When added to the previous estimate of haze damage, the total costs exceed $4.4 billion.

According to EEPSEA Director David Glover, "This is more than the damages assessed for the Exxon Valdez oil spill and India's Bhopal chemical spill combined. The resources lost would have been more than enough to provide basic sanitation, water and sewage services for Indonesia's 120 million rural poor."

The authors say that the figures are conservative, and do not take into account loss of life, long-term health effects, or the full value of lost biodiversity.

The principal damages include $493 million in timber losses; $470 million in foregone agricultural production; $1.8 billion in ecological services provided to people by forests (foods and medicine, water supply, erosion control, and others); and $272 million for the contribution to global warming from release of carbon.

According to Timothy Jessup, WWF's Senior Policy Adviser in Jakarta, the fires were promoted by a series of poorly designed policies including:

- a programme to drain and convert 1 million hectares of peat forest to rice cultivation. Fires on these former wetlands have been the most difficult to extinguish and created haze laden with sulphuric acid;
- unclear land ownership laws that encourage people and companies to clear land as a way of staking a claim, combined with weak law enforcement on land clearance;
- policies that keep the prices of wood supplied to processing mills low, providing little incentive to protect standing timber;
- short term leases of forest land to timber companies, which leave them with little incentive to manage forests sustainably.

"Changing these policies should be front and centre in the new government's reform programme," said Jessup. Land clearing by fire for planting of oil palm and timber caused up to 80 per cent of the 1997 fires.

A summary of the report can be seen on the EEPSEA and WWF Websites or obtained from either organisation. EEPSEA website: **www.idrc.org.sg/eepsea** WWF website: **www.panda.org**

GOLD FLUSH

UNICEF and the Mexican Government have launched a plan to build ten thousand ecological latrines for the city of Acapulco by the end of the century.

The latrines operate without water, require minimal maintenance and do not need a complex drainage system. Traditional latrines have been contaminating water supplies in the poorest neighbourhoods of the cities, causing up to 15,000 cases of intestinal infections amongst young children each year.

The installation of the new system will be backed up with a health promotion programme and training on the use and maintenance of the toilets.

UNICEF's *Progress of Nations 1997* report noted that almost 3 billion people around the world lack access to a decent toilet. These unhygienic conditions contribute to the deaths of more than 2 million children annually from diarrhoea.

Source: *News in Brief* March 1998, UNICEF London Office.

VIETNAM SUCCESS

New evidence of the cost-effective benefits of family planning comes from a study in Vietnam.

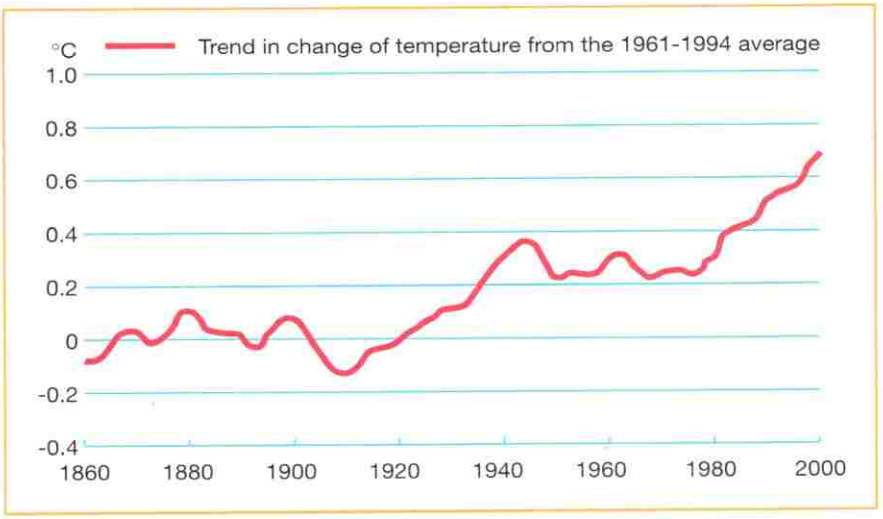
This reports that between 1979 and 1996 contraceptive prevalence in Vietnam rose from 35 per cent to 66 per cent, while the total fertility rate decreased from 4.8 to 2.8 births per woman.

These achievements were made possible, the analysis shows, by the strong support for family planning by the Vietnamese Government, which increased spending on its population programme more than eight-fold during the period, from 47 to 406 billion Dong (US$3.8 to 32.5 million).

Without that support, the analysis suggests, the country's population would have grown to 82 million in 1996 – five million more than its actual total. As a result, savings on social services totalled 1.3 trillion Dong (US$104 million), and by 2010 cumulative savings are expected to be nearly eight times greater than cumulative costs.

Ninety per cent of the savings will come from lower spending on education, and the rest from reduced costs of maternal and child health care and social services.

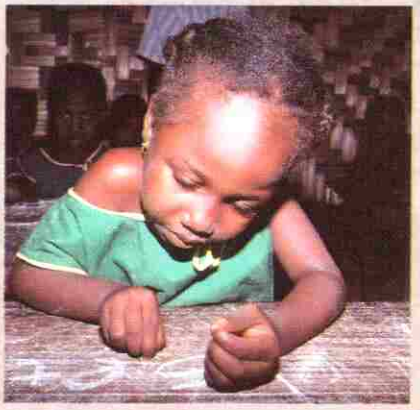
Vietnam's *Population and Family Planning Investments and Savings (1979-2010)* is published by the Center for Population Studies and Investment in Hanoi and The Futures Group in Washington.



Source: Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research

Girls: a key

Invisible and undervalued, millions of girls are still neglected, uneducated and abused – a wasted resource in the struggle for a sustainable future. **Sara Friedman** spells out the world's resistant response to a pressing problem.



Jon Spaull/Panos Pictures

Kemmeh Damba Danjo is a 17-year-old girl from The Gambia in West Africa. And one of the minority of girls who actually attend Secondary School. She is 'head girl' in her class, elected for her leadership and academic skills. Travelling to distant villages where she weaves hair, Kemmeh must also leave school for periods to earn money by other means for her own education as well as that of her younger brothers and sisters. When her cousin died in childbirth from loss of blood, Kemmeh took over the care of the baby.

Kemmeh is one of 15 adolescent girls from developing and industrialised countries in seven regions of the world who spoke to a packed room of delegates at the 42nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March. 'The Girl Child' was one of the four themes addressed at this third follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

These young women, aged 13-18, described the status of girls in their countries from their own perspective. Raising problems such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage, the girls found and focused on their common concerns. These included harassment and gender discrimination in school, sexual and physical abuse at home, violence and "rampant" teenage pregnancy.

"Of those who enrol, many stay only long enough to learn to read and add so they can then work and help their families. Those who don't attend, may take to the streets to beg or enter the world of drugs, violence and child prostitution."

Milena Silva, 17, Brazil.

Natalie Gray from the United Kingdom, pointed out the far reaching consequences of adolescent pregnancy for both mother and baby – poverty and poor health, social isolation, and limited life opportunities for many generations to come. But this issue is "so close to my heart," she said, "because a member of my family is one of those teenage mothers who has endured hardship and stigma...She is a single parent living on a low income and unable to continue her education."

The girls demonstrated clearly that injustice based on gender respects no boundaries of age, country or culture. Its manifestations have a harmful impact on the healthy development of girls in the most remote corners of the poorest countries and the largest urban centres of the richest nations.

In Brazil, according to Milena Silva, 17, many girls cannot afford school. "Of those who enrol, many stay only long enough to learn to read and add so they can then work and help their families. Those who don't attend, may take to the streets to beg or enter the world of drugs, violence and child prostitution."

These problems, which may begin at birth, are not new. What is new is the attention they are receiving from the international community. What is even newer is that girls themselves are asking to be heard, to be part of the solution. And the world is just opening its ears to listen.

Over the past two decades, the full participation of women in the cultural, social and economic life of their societies has been publicly acknowledged as a prerequisite for successful and sustainable development. The arrival of girls on the international agenda has been slower and even more difficult. As females and as children, they are without a voice, opportunity or political clout. Girls are still buried at the bottom of the iceberg, often invisible and isolated, among the poorest of the poor and the hardest to reach.

Girls first appeared on the international agenda in 1990 when the Declaration of the World Summit for Children acknowledged the need for

Sara Friedman

Main picture: Sonkali outside her school, Madhya Pradesh, India

Top: Child learning to write, Sierra Leone

Left: Kemmeh Danjo speaks out in New York

to the future

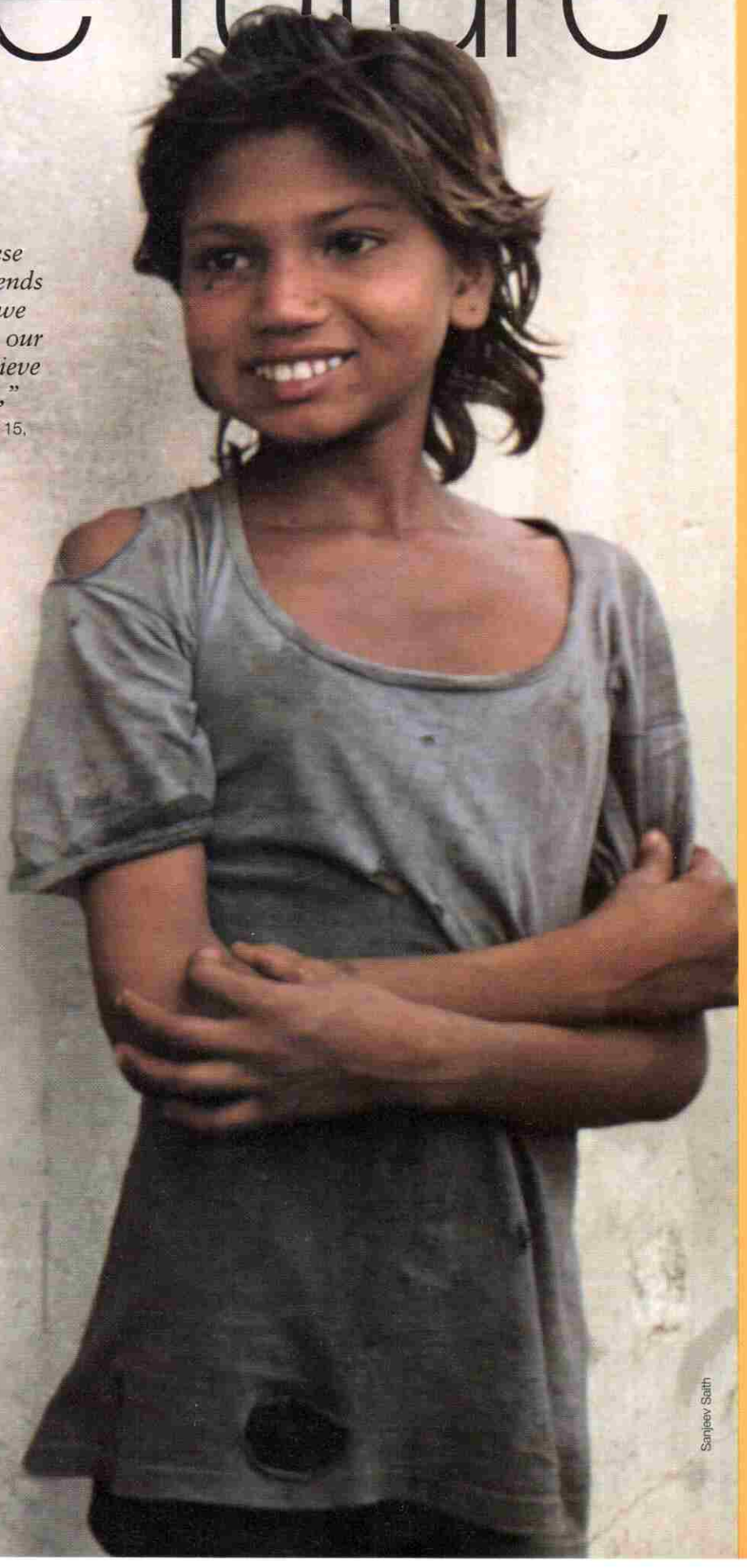
special attention to their survival, development and protection. In the same year, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the General Assembly and became, in less than a decade, the most widely ratified international human rights treaty and the framework for new legislation, policy and programming in many countries. This landmark, legally-binding document underscores the universality of all rights for all children and in conjunction with the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) establishes non-discrimination as one of its core principles.

"Solving these problems depends a lot on us; we must fight for our rights and believe in ourselves,"

Gayane Marukian, 15, Armenia

UN Conferences, such as the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), highlighted the need to improve the situation of girls, to provide access to information, education and services enabling them to make healthy life choices and decisions. And in 1995, the long, hard campaign and strong lobbying efforts spearheaded by women from Africa to adopt a life cycle approach to women's rights, won for girls their own separate chapter (Section L) in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Section L acknowledged publicly and globally that girls and women are bound in past, present and future – beyond the mother-and-child relationship. All women begin as girls and all girls – if they survive – develop into adult women. Without the other, neither can reach her full potential and an international spiral of poverty deprivation, discrimination, and dependency, exclusion and exploitation ensues, posing an insurmountable barrier to sustainable development. To "eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child," Section L committed all signatory governments to hundreds of concrete actions in all areas, including health and nutrition, education, protection against and prevention of violence and sexual and economic exploitation.



Sanjeev Saith

UNICEF-NY

Reality and rhetoric

But as human rights instruments are put in place and governments make commitments to provide equal opportunities for girls, there is a question about how well these promises have been transformed into practice, the words into deeds. For some, girls have already had too much attention. "What about boys?" they ask. But for most who have observed or participated in this arduous journey, the facts indicate no danger of reverse discrimination in even the most developed and enlightened countries. A focus on gender, they believe, includes boys and men as partners in the critical process of achieving the goals of equality, equity, and empowerment, justice peace, and mutual respect for everyone and, without which, sustainable development would not be possible.

"I hope you will not listen to us as children, but as members of the society who are the leaders of tomorrow."

Kenneth Kaunda Lusaka Zambia

The need for efforts to improve the situation of girls cannot be underestimated. Pioneering programmes have been started in countries worldwide by many local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and some governments, often in partnership with UNICEF and other intergovernmental agencies. In Egypt, Thailand, Nepal and Senegal, for example, programmes have increased the enrollment and completion of school for working girls, child rights training has been provided for law enforcement officials who deal with sexually-exploited girls, villages have been supported in their efforts to eliminate FGM.

UNICEF-UK

At the same time, the reality remains that in many parts of the world, large numbers of infant and young girls still die from neglect, deliberate abandonment, abuse or infanticide – because they are girls. Sixty per cent of the estimated 140 million primary-school-aged children who are out of school are still girls and they comprise two-thirds of the 100 million children who drop out of school. Adolescent pregnancy takes the lives of nearly 146,000 girls every year, accounting for 25 per cent of all maternal deaths. Another two million girls are subjected to FGM.

The vast majority of the 250 million working children, estimated by the ILO, are girls – invisible, uncounted and undervalued, working in their own homes and in the homes of others, on the streets or in brothels, many in conditions of virtual slavery. The number of adolescent girls with HIV/AIDS is rising rapidly and more and more girls orphaned by AIDS are heads of households. And the rape and abuse of girls is not only a by-product, but often a deliberate act of armed conflict.

A PATH FOR GIRLS

Survey results from 250 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in 87 countries on progress for girls since Beijing indicate that many governments have made commitments and passed new laws to improve the situation of girls, but that few are adequately enforced.

The survey report, *Clearing a Path for Girls*, says that across the regions, education and violence are the two most critical issues facing girls. NGOs agreed that good progress has been made in primary school enrollment for girls. They also agreed that girls drop out of school at a far higher rate than boys, a rate that even seems to be increasing.

In regard to violence, the survey reflects a strong global view that, despite increasing public awareness, sexual and physical abuse both inside and outside the family remains among the most serious obstacles to girls' development and among the most widespread violations of their rights.

Contact: NGO Working Groups on Girls; UNICEF House, TA24A, New York, NY 10017, USA. Or fax Sara Friedman at: (+1 212) 824 6482.

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

A survey of 250 NGOs working in 87 countries, conducted by the NGO Working Groups on Girls, indicated that progress is scattered and slow on the part of governments (see box). And according to the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, of the 87 governments submitting National Action Plans to follow-up Beijing, only 27 referred to specific programmes for girls.

In recognition of the need to "move the agenda forward", the third follow-up to Beijing concluded with more than 50 new recommended actions in diverse areas urged upon governments and local authorities, NGOs and other civil society organisations and intergovernmental agencies.

Focusing on girls

There are no quick fixes in improving the well-being and status of girls. Sustainable solutions require a shift in perspective from the issues, or the circumstances thrust on girls by discrimination, to girls themselves. Girls must become visible as human beings with inherent rights and the opportunity to participate actively in decisions affecting their lives.

Girls are the hub, the centre around which their situations revolve. A shift in perspective from the broad issues, such as education and health, and to the girl herself – to her education, her health, her entitlement, and her empowerment – is the only road to sustainable development.

In different voices, 15 adolescent girls from seven different countries repeated this truth over and over. "Right now I bet that most girls around the world have no idea about the rights of girls we are discussing here," said 18-year-old Sarah Patterson from the United States. "Solving these problems depends a lot on us; we must fight for our rights and believe in ourselves," said Gayane Marukian, 15, from Armenia. And from the Gambia came Kemmeh's strong voice: "I hope you will not listen to us as children, but as members of the society who are the leaders of tomorrow." ■

Sara Ann Friedman is a New York-based journalist, with a special interest in children's issues, especially those related to girls. She is a consultant for the NGO Working Groups on Girls and for UNICEF.

Top left: Adolescent girls address delgates at the 42nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Left: Girls at primary school in India – but many will drop out

Top: Schoolgirls, Indonesia

Wang Gang Feng/Panos Pictures

Up to 100 million girls are 'missing' from the global population: victims of sex-selected abortion and neglect. The health of many who survive is severely compromised by poor nutrition, teenage pregnancy and harmful social practices. **Professor Mahmoud Fathalla** reports.

The miss

The killing of girl babies, a practice once prevalent in many societies, has not completely disappeared. In some cases it continues as a physical act by poor and desperate parents. In others, it has risen Phoenix-like in new forms. It has been brought *earlier* with the use of new technologies for the selective abortion of the female foetus, and it has been *deferred* and changed to a *passive* form of child death through neglect and discrimination.

Modern science has provided tools for prenatal diagnosis of congenital abnormalities. Ultrasound, amniocentesis and chorionic villus sampling have, however, been abused for prenatal sex diagnosis, and where pregnancy termination services are available, for selective abortion of the female foetus.

In a number of countries, the practice has taken a large dimension. The masculinity ratio has been rising steeply in China in recent years from the normal 105 to almost 120. In India, the practice became so prevalent that the government felt obliged to punish it by law. Throughout the 1980s, selective abortion of female foetuses in South Korea has become more common. In 1991, 115 boys were born per 100 girls, up from 110 in 1985 and 107 in 1982. In 1991 the sex ratio for first-born children was 106:100, but for the second child it was 123, for the third 185, and for the fourth 212, according to the National Statistical Office.

This violation of the right of the girl child is particularly disturbing because it involves the medical profession and has been made possible by medical advances. In fact, a recent survey of 71 medical geneticists in four developing countries and 611 in 15 developed countries found widespread willingness to use prenatal diagnosis for sex selection purposes.

"Eighteen goddess-like daughters are not equal to one son with a bump"

A proverb from old China

Awareness about gender discrimination in health is relatively recent. When attention was given to segregating infant and child mortality by gender, the evidence for discrimination became apparent.

In the World Fertility Survey conducted in the 1980s, the question of sex differentials in mortality was examined in 24 developing countries. The data is based on household surveys, thus eliminating a bias in death registration. For the infant, in all countries except two, the female mortality was lower. When the infant became a toddler, 12 out of 24 countries showed a higher mortality for the female. When it came to the 2 to 5 year-old child, 15 out of the 24 countries showed reversal of the mortality ratio in favour of the male child.

Perish the baby girls

It is difficult to explain this data on medical grounds only. Contrary to what some people may like to think, or are led to believe, the female of the species is the biologically stronger sex. Under equitable conditions of health care, infant and child mortality should be consistently lower for females. This *biological advantage* may be eroded by the *social disadvantage* of being female, particularly in poor settings where children will compete for scarce resources.

A national sample household survey conducted in Egypt showed that, overall, infant mortality was lower for females. However, when the data was broken down between the neonatal (first month)

ing millions

and post-neonatal period, a different picture emerged. For the neonatal period, the mortality for the female was much lower than for the male. Deaths in the neonatal period result mostly from events during intra-uterine life, a phase protected from social prejudice. After the neonatal period, when the girl infant begins to face the consequences of social reality, the mortality differential was reversed.

The alarm bells about the massive "culling" of females were rung by *Newsweek*, under the heading *Perish the baby girls*, in August 1995.

The magazine was able to draw on the work of demographers who analysed the sex ratios in different populations, compared to the expected ratios if societies offered equal health conditions to both males and females. They concluded that between 60 and 100 million females are missing in the world.

Son preference

Gender differentials in mortality reflect a deep-seated preference for sons in many cultures, coupled with under-estimating the worth of the girl child. The World Fertility Survey estimated an index of son preference for 38 countries. The index ranged from 0.7 in Jamaica to 4.9 in Pakistan. Son preference is manifested by a differential in access to health care, an unequal share of nutrition from the small family pot and possibly shorter durations of breastfeeding.

The International Conference on Population and Development, convened in Cairo in September 1994, urged that "Leaders at all levels of the society must speak out and act forcefully against patterns of discrimination within the family, based on preference for sons. One of the aims should be to eliminate excess mortality of girls, whenever such a pattern exists."

Assault on the clitoris

Female genital mutilation is another striking example of the failure to protect the girl child's right to health. Estimates of the worldwide prevalence of female genital mutilation range from 85 to 114 million, with an annual rate of increase of about two million per year. About 6,000 girls are "circumcised" each day.

A lot has been said and written about the physical, mental and social health risks associated with this harmful traditional practice. One fact is sometimes lost: The practice is a flagrant violation of human rights, as a harmful procedure performed on a child who cannot give informed consent.

The General Assembly of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) unanimously adopted in 1994 a resolution calling for an end to this harmful practice.

Mothers too soon

When a teenager is made a mother, she is not only at an increased risk of complications related to the current pregnancy and childbirth, but she has to face long-term consequences, physical, mental and social, which impact on her health.

Only few of the teenage pregnancies are really wanted by the young mother. The girls have either been coerced by social pressure into early marriage and early pregnancy, or as unmarried adolescents have been denied free access to contraception. In some areas too, young girls exchange sexual favours to meet their material needs. Adolescents account for at least 10 per cent of all induced abortions.

Judgement day

The Holy Muslim book, the Koran, includes a vivid description of an awe-inspiring scene from God's judgement day, in which the horrendous crime of female infanticide is brought to justice. The little infants are brought forward and are asked to testify about the circumstances of their death.

Those of us who believe in God and in God's judgement day should make no mistake about it. When millions of girl children are denied their God-given right of life and health are brought forward to testify on God's judgement day, many will be called to account for their actions, and many more will be called to account for their lack of action. ■

Dr Mahmoud F. Fathalla is Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Assiut University in Egypt.

Left top: A girl from Quing Lai Province, China
Below left: Rural school consisting of 4 girls and 26 boys, Burkina Faso

THE CHINESE PUZZLE

The story of China's missing girls is not new. Chinese records suggest that the traditional preference for boys goes back as long as Chinese written history, *writes Sue Mulley*.

At the national level, the shortage of girls is quite phenomenal and growing worse, according to Professor Judith Banister of the Division of Social Science at Hong Kong's University of Science and Technology.

In 1990, there were 110 boys per 100 girls in the zero to four-year-old age group, but five years later, the sample census showed that there were 118 boys per 100 girls in this category.

"There is an interesting argument that this is a self-correcting problem: that when you have a severe shortage of marriageable women, all of a sudden females become more valuable because they are rarer, and that raises the status of females. I think this is incorrect.

"For the last several thousand years there has been discrimination against girls, so severe that it has caused a shortage of females at every age and it hasn't done a thing for the status of females," says Professor Banister.

"Until this century, and really until the People's Republic of China started implementing an ideology of male/female equality in 1949, you had atrocious discrimination against females at all levels of society. It didn't matter that in 1953, the whole population had a ratio of 100 females to 108 males."

The shortage of females has been linked to the abduction of women for forced marriage. Some 70,000 women and children were freed from 1992 to 1996 and some 130,000 kidnappers arrested, according to reports from *China Women's News* and Associated Press.

The number of missing girls varies greatly by rural and urban areas, and from province to province, with the most missing in Guangdong, Guangxi and Zhejiang, says Professor Banister. The most serious missing girl problem is in traditional Han regions of China, and the problem is not nearly as serious or is non-existent in the border and minority provinces.

Although the census does not explain what is causing the missing girls, an educated guess can be made by comparing the ratio of boys to girls at each age group.

By 1990, in some provinces sex-selective abortion was introduced, and this is reflected in the rapid shift in the missing girls by single year of age among the children. In some provinces, sex-selective abortion had begun to be used in urban but not rural areas, and vice versa in other provinces.

"It partly had to do with attitudes towards girls, and also the availability of the technology," Professor Banister explains. However, there appeared to be continuing use of infanticide and selective neglect against girls.

The next complete population census is due to be held in the year 2000.

Sue Mulley is People & the Planet *correspondent in Hong Kong.*

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

Special Report

Earlier this year **Rami Chhabra**, one of India's leading journalists, travelled through the sub-continent for *People & the Planet* to report on the progress of The Girl Child Decade which is now drawing to a close. Here she introduces a 10-page report.

Blossoms in the wind

It was Spring across the Indian sub-continent when I travelled. In Bangladesh, the delicately-scented manjuri blossom was ablaze in golden promise in mango-groves backdropped by jade paddy-fields. The air in Pakistan's North West Frontier blended an even headier mix of orange blossom, apricot, wild rose, musked by ripened wheat and sugar cane. And deep in the Shamble ravines in central India, clouds of white butterflies shifted from one hees bush to another. It was a time of gentle growth and beauty everywhere – like girlhood should, ordinarily, be.

Sanjeev Saini

But sharp, unseasonable squalls symbolised the hostile, uneasy environment surrounding the sub-continent's most precious blooms: her girl children. They are a cause for global anxiety, for individual tragedies apart, the sub-continent's girls form one-twentieth of all humanity.

From dusky, 14-year-old Shilpi, a rescued child-worker of the garment industry, now in a non-formal education centre in Dhaka, to the alabaster-faced teenage Pathan girl, Ispogman, in the Girl Child Centre in Peshawar, bordering Afghanistan, to Gita, the 10-year-old *gujjar* girl grazing goats and sand-scribbling alphabet letters in the ragtag school-class conducted under the Educational Guarantee Scheme on the banks of the Chambal river on the edge of Madhya Pradesh, the overwhelming remembrance is of faces bright with hopes and dreams even in the midst of considerable squalor. There was, everywhere I went, a hunger for knowledge, a wistful yearning for the full flowering potential of bursting talents. But ever-hanging darkly in the air is the reality that these girls straggle last in a long queue where the governing cultural convention is of precedence to the old over the young, the male over the female.

The sub-continent yawns a wide chasm of want. *The Human Development Report* on South Asia documents the region as "the poorest, the most illiterate, the most malnourished and the least gender-sensitive in the world." Its share of human deprivation is twice as high as its share of the developing world's population – and the deprivation is intrinsically female-visaged. The poverty of opportunity has wide gender gaps on just about every front – health, education, economic, social and political.

Of the world's billion absolute poor living on less than a dollar a day, half are on the Indian sub-continent. Of these, two-thirds are female, a sizeable proportion just girls. Gender-adjusted human development is a quarter lower in South Asia than the average in developing countries. In terms of gender-empowering measures – the access to political, economic and social opportunities – South Asia's female profile lags still further behind, chalking the lowest value of any region of the world.

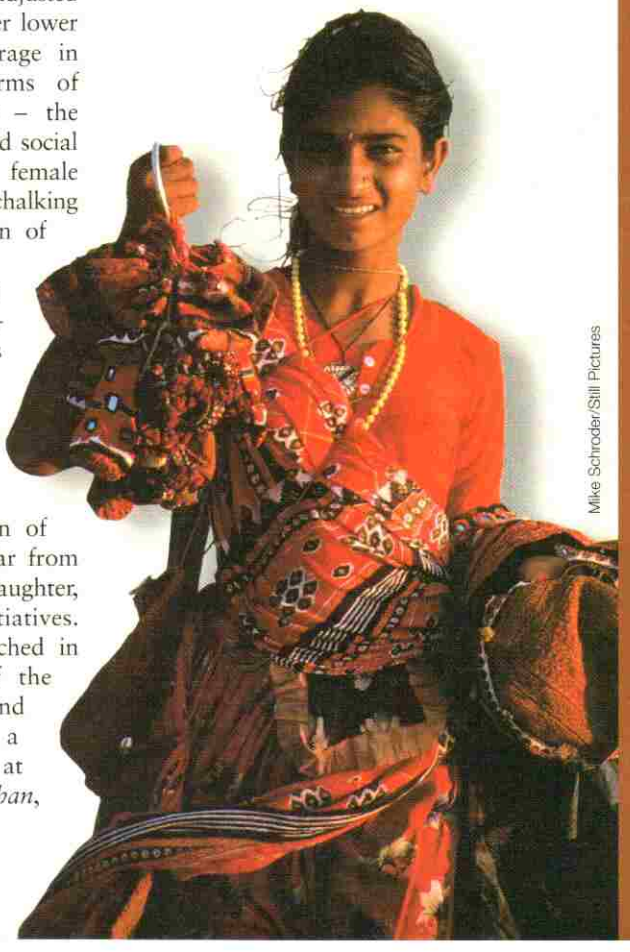
This is true despite great variations in women's well-being, especially in matters of health an education, both between and within countries in the region.

If the past stands deeply mortgaged for the over-burdened, undervalued woman of South Asia the future is yet far from holding a reprieve for her daughter, notwithstanding growing initiatives. The Girl Child Decade, launched in South Asia at the onset of the nineties has barely moved beyond the sensitisation stage in a socio-cultural context which, at best, treats the girl as *paraya dhan*, the other's treasure.

In an age that knows education to be the prime engine for growth, South Asia not only holds nearly half the world's illiterate adults, two-thirds women; but also, two-fifths of the children out of school, mainly female.

Twenty-eight million girls, one-third of all girls of this age, remain out of school at the primary level alone. Net enrollment ratios in South Asia have wider disparities than all other developing regions. Net enrollment of girls in primary education remains 69 per cent compared to 88 per cent for boys, a near-fourfold difference from the developing world average.

Of those girls who do join, 42 per cent drop out before completing the primary cycle. At the secondary level the enrollment is half that of boys. In all, the mean years of schooling are about one-third of boys and the period itself an appalling 1.2 years on an average. What skills can be garnered in this time? How can a girl be empowered to be a 21st century citizen of the world without even basic education?


Mike Schroder/Still Pictures

Left: Girl making carpet for export Rajasthan, India
Top: Young girl looks after her younger sibling, Deckhatpura village, Madhya Pradesh, India
Right: Street-seller, Goa, India

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

Sanjeev Saith

Left: Children receive an impromptu lesson from a visiting lecturer, Madhya Pradesh, India.

Below: Girls learn wiring for a bulb

Just three countries – India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – stage half the world's battle for girls education. The critical constraints have been long known – beyond the paucity of infrastructure itself, there are the issues of the relevance and quality of the education, personal security and the opportunity costs of foregoing a girl's help in household chores and sibling-care. But while each country claims to be grappling with the issues, nowhere is there the necessary large-scale commitment.

Statistics bear out impressions. South Asia spends a mere 3.5 per cent on all education at present – with India's higher 3.8 per cent leveraging up the lower than 3 per cent spending ratios of other countries. The requirement of universal primary education alone is estimated at 5-6 per cent of the GNP. Advocacy is now zeroing in on primary education and non-formal education initiatives, but that could yet leave older girls making do with very little.

Despite all the constitutional guarantees of 'equal opportunity' it seems that a whole new generation of girl-children will grow up not much different than their deprived mothers. Simultaneously, new dangers and challenges have arisen. Perhaps, the most alarming is the seismic crack in the sub-continent's civilisational pride that has held the honour of women centre-stage.

"Rape of Five Year Old in the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court's Premises" screamed front-page headlines in national newspapers as I arrived in Dhaka, in mid-March. It was not a solitary episode as other headlines highlighted: "Another Minor Girl Raped in the City" "Yet Another Little Girl Violated". The news left many amongst Bangladesh's army of articulate social activists – who have consistently documented the growing trafficking from and sexual abuse in Bangladesh – stunned.

Pakistan's North West Frontier, where women move with chadors drawn across the face in public, was in the grip of a remarkably similar sordid drama – the alleged gang-rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl in a room of the Provincial Civil Secretariat, where she was said to have been enticed on the pretext of work.

Arriving in central India, at Morena, a district headquarters in Madhya Pradesh – a state which for several years now has had the highest incidence of crimes against women in India – I found local newspapers reporting the tale of abduction and gang rape of four tribal girls gathering firewood in a forest area, 50 kilometres away.

Activists across the sub-continent argue that it is in the grip of a malefic storm of sexual violence, human trafficking and exploitation with girls the principal victim.

I observed, first hand, the absence of any arrangements for traumatised, rescued young girls at Shibogunj on the Bangladesh-India border or of alternatives for the street-walking girls in Rajshahi who desperately pleaded to be taken out of this "dirty work". I saw the abject condition of the Dar ul Iman I visited in the North West Frontier and the shelter homes in Dhaka and Delhi – all with such minimal facilities that it would be inconceivable for them to effectively rehabilitate.

Particularly poignant was the stop at my travel-end, which had brought me into the heart of the contiguous belt in central Northern India acknowledged to be one primary recruitment source area for India's sex-slave trade. There at Morena I saw good work of years with the Bhedia tribe standing on the edge of collapse for want of funds to carry on.

Across the sub-continent, both problems and resource constraints are multiplying, while funding biases get more pronounced and rhetoric grows richer by the hour. Yet, so little could achieve so much for the most defenceless. For example, the *Human Development Report* estimates the cost of an Emergency National Campaign for Primary Education throughout South Asia at a mere $3 billion a year for the next five years, even with permanent capital costs included. South Asia spent exactly that on defence in one year alone – $15 billion in 1995.

Distortions in the sub-continent's perspectives and priorities are aggravating not decreasing. Sexual violence too is part of a growing macho military mind-set. The overall ground reality is of an endangered spring on the sub-continent, and the buds that will not bloom this time are millions of little girls. ■

CEDPA

Bangladesh: giving girls the 'key of keys'

Rami Chhabra reports

Totally absorbed, nine-year-old Regina Khatau barely glances up from the slate on which she is writing, seated on a jute-strip on the mud-floor in a thatched bamboo hut among 30-odd children, similarly engrossed. But at the teacher's call she scrambles to her feet with a loud *Salaam-e-lequm*, confidently moves across to the hand-made cloth-calendar at the far-end and rapidly changes the dates to mark the occasions called out. Task over, she returns to her place, unselfconscious of the long tear in her dress.

Regina is the daughter of landless labourers, the eldest in a family of six in Chowk Kapasia East, a village some 250 kilometres northwest of Dhaka in Rajshahi District,

"*Khub bhalo, ami, achi*, I like studying" she flashes, eyes lighting up to my query.

Regina is one of the millions of poor children in Bangladesh who have never previously gone to school (or who have dropped out), whom a hundred NGOs – in partnership with the government – are now reaching to teach basic skills and where possible, link with the formal education system.

Some 52,000 non-formal schools have been started across the country by the NGOs. Amongst these the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) alone is responsible for 34,000 Non Formal Education Centres. This hut in Chowk Kapasia East is one such BRAC-NFE centre. And even if the state of Regina's dress disturbs she is clearly part of a system that has resulted in Rajshahi having the lowest number of primary school age children outside school.

BRAC's programme has been noted as being particularly effective in providing learning opportunities to girls who make up roughly 70 per cent of the pupils in the non-formal education system. BRAC is also a main implementing agency in the recent arrangement ILO/UNICEF have forged with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers Export Association (BGMEA) which provides a stipend of 300 taka (US$6.5) to former child garment workers enabling the children to study instead of work. The amount is meagre and a total of under 10,000 children were identified, but it is a breakthrough of sorts in the commercial sector's involvement.

Fourteen-year-old Shilpi, in Dhaka's largest slum, is one such rescued child worker, in a non-BRAC-NFE centre. Earlier her job, as a helper cutting threads in one of Bangladesh's 2,000 garment factories, earned her 1,000 taka working a 12-14 hour shift. It supplemented her garment worker-mother's wages in the support of an abandoned family of five. The stipend has brought her into a learning situation she likes, although her work situation has grown more tenuous and onerous – she now also works as a domestic help and does order-work at home.

But perhaps these triple shifts for girls like Shilpi will be tackled eventually. BRAC, Grameen Bank and several other leading NGOs in Bangladesh are in the forefront of developing sophisticated alternative self-employment and marketing networks that create competitive clout to combat exploitative working conditions.

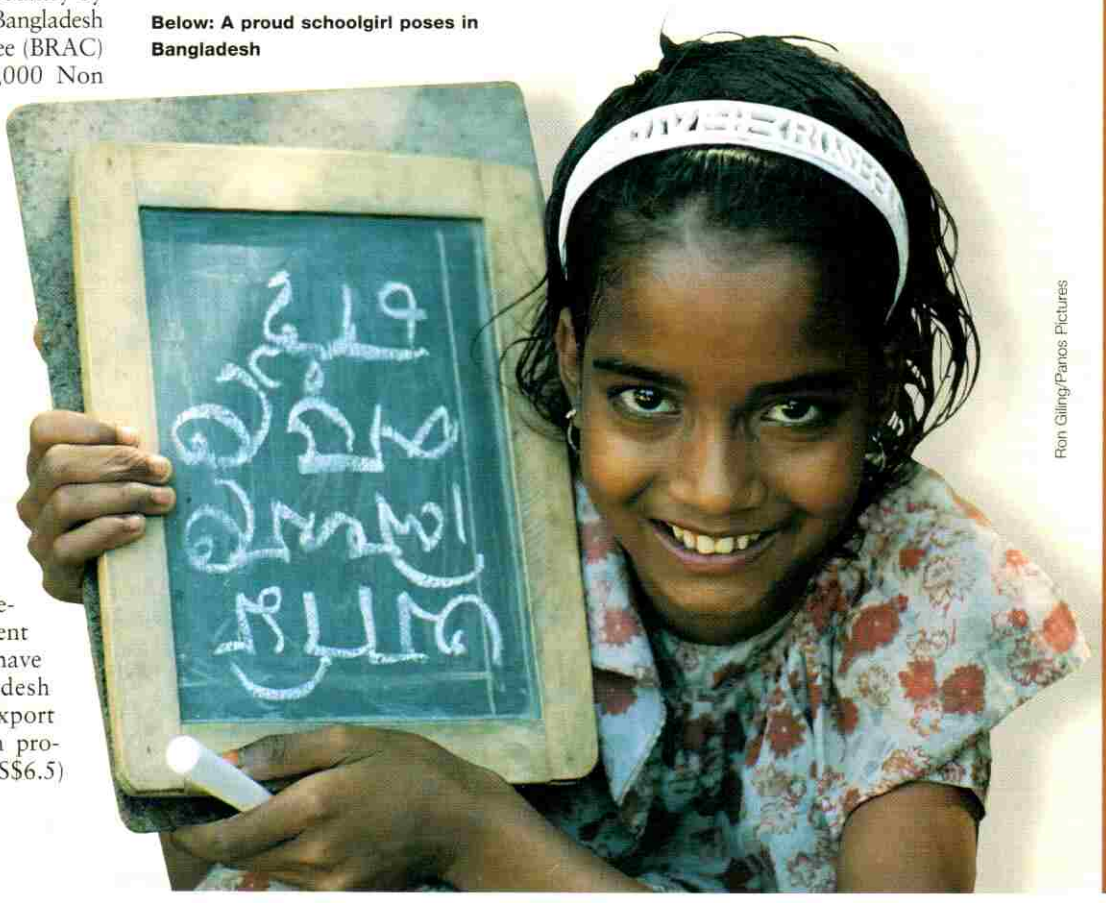
Beginning with 22 villages in 1985, BRAC now caters to over a million students annually, of which 700,000 are girls. It has designed two to three-year condensed courses geared specially for those who have dropped out and those who have never gone to school. Gender sensitivity is a built-in feature at every level. The centres have an average of 33 students to a class, but 20 must be girls.

Building close community participation in the running of the school as a prerequisite, BRAC also provides a model for local teaching resource development. Flexible school timings and imaginative co-curricular activities that range over practical needs like gardening and sanitation, and use of songs, role-playing and storytelling techniques, have resulted in attendance rates exceeding 95 per cent at such centres.

Ninety per cent of non-formal centre students complete the course which provides an effective springboard for fairly large numbers to move into the formal educational stream. Average costs incurred per child per year are estimated at $20 – no different from the government annual investment per primary child, and roughly 40 per cent when drop-out rates are discounted.

Besides imaginative initiatives such as the NFE, a number of other positive

Below: A proud schoolgirl poses in Bangladesh



Ron Giling/Panos Pictures

MD Khairul Kabir Tuhin

Left: Girls sitting school exams, Bangladesh

measures have been taken. Primary education is now compulsory and under the direct charge of the Prime Minister. Government expenditure on education has tripled in real terms and over a billion dollars are earmarked for primary education over the next five years. The results are already evident. Eighty per cent of the primary 6-11 year age group are now enrolled – and there is an identical ratio of boys and girls in the primary education sector, both in rural and urban areas.

Secondary education for girls has yet to pick up equally well, and only a third of the primers move into secondary as yet. But girls now comprise 42 per cent of secondary school pupils. While distances and the numbers of secondary schools still pose problems, secondary education has been made free for girls up to Grade 10 in rural areas and non-metropolitan urban areas. A special scheme – providing a monthly stipend to girls, with the proviso that they remain unmarried, achieve second class marks and 75 per cent attendance has been initiated country-wide, after a successful pilot phase through a World Bank project.

That something has begun to happen for girl's education in Bangladesh is very obvious, even if yet it remains a far cry from what is needed. Deepening poverty and developmental outreach is both pushing and pulling women into the workforce in droves. Mothers, who have overcome personal odds, have become a driving force.

Forty kilometres away, along the Padma River to Gram Biralda, I met one – Ambika Khatun, a young woman who barely made it to the third class, was married by the age of 11 and was a victim of domestic violence until a few years ago. Then a local NGO counselled and trained the couple in plant propagation and provided micro-credit of 1,000 taka. Ambika's thrift and hard work generated a 26-fold return with which the couple have purchased jointly-owned land.

Standing proudly in the midst of her nursery farm – work in which she has four co-workers while the elder two daughters contribute two hours every evening after-school – she says authoritatively: "My daughters will study up to university, they will be fully self-sufficient from the start." Her eldest daughter, 13-year-old Jasimine, nods affirmatively: "I will be a teacher in a big school and also run a nursery of my own. My mother is not like the mothers of some of my friends. Three of the girls in my class were married off this year. No one asked them what they wanted."

The number of women like of Ambika Khatun is rising, and a different future for their daughters is something they are determined to bring about.

But alongside such examples, like the unpredictable sea that surrounds Bangladesh, there is the contrary rising wave of child abuse, sexual violence, trafficking and prostitution, growing like a fearful cyclone, fed by increasing disparities, growing wants and a breakdown of held values.

The fate of the manjuri blossom trembles in the wind, against such odds. ■

See special film offer on page 35

A NEW BEAST RAMPAGES

"Our women are doubly endangered today by pincer movements of violence from traditional and modern ends," says Begum Tasmima Hussain, Editor of *Ananaya*, a leading women's magazine and one of the seven elected women in Parliament, in Bangladesh.

"The right of the child to development hinges upon elimination of prostitution."
India's Supreme Court

"Violence against women – of which rape of young girls is a significant segment – has spiralled alarmingly in Bangladesh in recent years." Many activists identify the combustible combination of growing female pauperisation and a media-inspired social libertarianism as major push-factors in the social breakdown.

The Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA) reports 862 cases of severe violence against females in a six-month period last year. These included 85 cases of acid throwing and as many as 20 cases of rape of under-five year olds in the last quarter of 1997 alone, while more than 90 cases – 50 per cent of all reported rape cases – were of teenagers and younger girls.

Workers of BNWLA which has just carried out an in-depth survey of the problem cla that thousands of girls are being trafficked within and out of Bangladesh for slave labour and prostitution, "generally, but most especially child prostitution is increasing."

Pakistan's recently published Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women says: "A most disturbing trend is the increase in the incidence of rape of young girls and minors."

Based on reported cases alone, the estimate is that a rape occurs every three hours in Pakistan. Of the 50 cases reported in 10 days in 1996 from just one geographical area of the Punjab 20 victims were minors, the youngest being eight years of age.

"The right of the child to development hinges upon elimination of prostitution," ruled India's Supreme Court in a landmark judgement, taking note of rampant commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking in India. A growing body of research provides evidence of large numbers of girls, aged 6 to 18 years, amongst those in prostitution in the brothels of India – variously estimated at between 30-50 per cent.

"There is increasing demand and for younger and younger girls" reports Moline Giro, Chairperson of the National Commission on Women which has looked into the issue, but has so far failed to promote an effective deterrent. Facing the sordid reality, India's Supreme Court has ordered the Government to prepare a detailed plan of action and report regularly on implementation of measures to combat the situation and rescue and rehabilitate the traumatised children.

Why girls of Syuta drop out of school

In 1981, there were 181 million illiterate women in India. By 1991, the number had risen to 197 million – this despite an increase in the rate of literacy for Indian women aged seven and above, from 30 to 39 per cent. **Anil Agarwal** reports from one Indian village on the link between female literacy and environmental degradation.

Getting girls into school and keeping them there is a major challenge that India faces in common with many other developing countries. As female literacy is strongly correlated with population growth rates, solving the former would turn out to be a socially just solution for the latter. Hence, the urgent need to tackle female illiteracy.

Many studies have shown that the main obstacles to the growth of female literacy in India are rooted in caste and cultural and economic factors. While these are important factors, little attention has been paid to the effect of adverse environmental pressures on female literacy.

It is well known that the girl child plays an important role as an assistant to the mother in doing household work. But when the mother's work burden is made heavy by poverty, male migration and environmental degradation, it seems clear that the opportunity for schooling will be further limited. To confirm this, the Centre for Science and Environment conducted a detailed study in one Himalayan village.

Syuta, as we shall call it, is a typically picturesque, Himalayan settlement nestled in a small watershed. Its population of 213 in 1987 had grown from 157 in 1971.

Tough task

Even though individual landholdings are small, around 1.5 hectares, work is back-breaking because villagers have to collect biomass resources over a large 183-hectare area to manure their small plots. Farming is carried out on narrow terraces and soil is so poor that it must be heavily manured. The villagers depend entirely on cow-dung and leaf manure from the forest floor for soil nutrients. This requires each household to rear cattle mainly as dung-producers.

The quantity of biomass material that has to be carried annually for soil nutrition is astonishing. Syuta's inhabitants collect about 40 tonnes of leaves from the forest for use as bedding material in cattle-sheds. They also collect about 100 tonnes of leaves and 275 tonnes of grass from the forest, more than 25 tonnes of leaves from private trees, and nearly 210 tonnes of grass from grasslands, and more than 15 tonnes of crop residues from agricultural fields to feed for their cattle. This generates about 600 tonnes of manure, which is carried from cattle-sheds to the farm terraces for manuring at the rate of about 20 tonnes per hectare per year. In addition to farming, Syuta villagers collect about 200 tonnes of firewood for cooking, graze their animals and perform a host of household and marketing chores.

The burden of work falls mainly on women (and girls) who form a majority of the village's labour force. Of Syuta's 92 main workers, 50 are women and 42 are men. Women also start working at a much younger age than men, who become main workers between the ages of 16 and 28 years. Before schooling started in the village, men would generally begin playing an active economic role at age 15, but because of growing desire for education, the age to start as main workers is usually postponed until after 20. However, those men who do not favour studies, join the village work force at age 16-18.

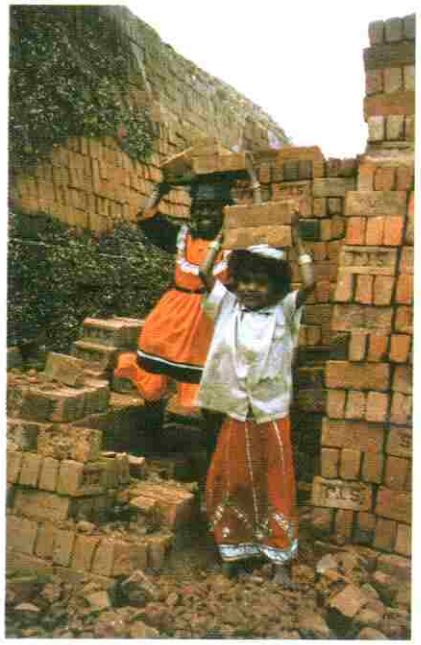
Increasing burden

Women, on the other hand, start playing an active role in the household's economic activities even before they are 15. In fact, two village girls in the 10-15 age group were already putting in a full day's work in farming. Whereas all women main workers in the village are cultivators, only 60 per cent of Syuta's male main workers were cultivators. The rest worked in the service sector in the village or as migrants in other parts of the country.

Women not only work long hours in the home, but their burden in the village's agricultural economy is also inadequately shared by men. They break up the hard earth, make it ready for the plough, sow the seed, weed the crop up to five times, reap it, pound the paddy to dehusk it, carry manure from cattle-shed to distant fields, do all the housework and the care for the

Jorgen Schytte/Still Pictures

Left: A young girl carries a basket of firewood



WFS

Left: Young girls carrying bricks, India

Main picture: Young girls help in threshing wheat, Khaliyan, India

animals. They also cut and carry loads of grass and fuel from the forest.

Given the heavy work burden on women, much of the domestic work is delegated to the girl child. Many of the children who do not go to school perform house-work that makes them vital in the village's subsistence and market economy.

The demand for household labour forces children into such household activities as collecting grass and firewood, grazing animals, fetching water, cooking and, most importantly, caring for the younger children in the family. Of 39 Syuta children aged 5 to 10, one boy and four girls aged 8 were important workers in their families. One girl spent about eight hours daily on cooking, fetching water, cleaning utensils and baby-sitting her younger sister. Slightly older girls assume full responsibilities for grass and firewood collection, grazing cattle and assisting in farming tasks.

Long hours

The heavy work burden of Syuta women becomes evident when their working hours are studied. They get a brief respite during the lean agricultural period in January and August, which means they work for little more than nine hours a day. From January to June, they work for more than 12 hours a day, with the work reaching a peak of 13 to 15 hours a day in April and September.

The women are helped the most in carrying out their daily chores by children aged below 15. If the total work-hours in Syuta are computed, an interesting pattern emerges, showing that women put in 53 per cent, children 26 per cent and men 21 per cent. Children put in almost double the work hours of men. Even if household activity such as cooking, fetching water and cleaning utensils are excluded, Syuta children still put in 1.4 times more work than men.

Syuta's economy and ecology have considerable effect on the education of village children. In spite of its remote location in the high Himalaya, Syuta was recorded as having a high literacy rate of 54 per cent in 1987. This is because there is a primary school in the village, enabling boys and girls to be educated conveniently. The village also has had a junior high school since 1986. However, although the official literacy rate in Syuta is high, the level of education is extremely low. Nearly 70 per cent of those deemed literate have had only primary education. Many so-called literates cannot read and find it difficult to write their own name.

School attendance is low, considering Syuta residents have the convenience of having a primary school in the village itself. More than 50 per cent of the 5-10 age group is not enrolled in school, though attendance does improve in the higher age groups. Of the village's 48 children in the 10-15 age group, 85 per cent attended school.

The attendance pattern indicates most children go to school but begin as late as age 10. Education is brief for girls and ends by the time they are 15. Fewer than 10 per cent of the girls get beyond the primary stage. A study of Syuta village shows not only low levels of education, but also clear inequality between the sexes. As education advances, the dropout rate increases rapidly for both boys and girls in Syuta, and the student ratio by sex changes drastically. In primary school, the number of boys and girls enrolled is equal, but by high school all the girls drop out.

Both culture and the heavy workload on women are reasons for the high dropout rate among girls, who inherit their mother's workload. Syuta's literacy achievement is because the village has a school. But children who must go out of the village for their schooling, tend to stop their education after the primary level. All this has implications for the increase of female literacy in India and abroad, in countries with similar conditions.

As Syuta's population grows, their men will increasingly have to migrate and send their money orders to their families, or agricultural land will have to be increased even though this means a greater demand for soil nutrients, increased pressure on the forest fringe, a slow rollback of the dense forest cover and an increase in the work burden on women. As women already spend up to 15 hours a day at work during some months, it is unthinkable that they can do more work.

Hence, much of the extra work burden will be delegated to girl children. The result will be that even if the government provides educational facilities, these will be grossly under-used because girls will be the first to be pulled out of school because of pressure of household chores.

Regional differences

No systematic studies are being undertaken in India to document the work burden of women in different agro-ecosystems. But data collected by energy experts does show wide differences in women's work-load. In hill and mountain regions and in arid and semi-arid areas, where forests have receded or disappeared and agriculture remains poor, women spend extraordinary amounts of time collecting firewood, fodder and water. In Himalayan villages and in Thar desert settlements in Rajasthan and Gujarat, for example, women spend 6 to 10 hours daily collecting basic survival needs.

But in the rich plains areas, where forest biomass loss has been replaced in part by agricultural biomass as in the Green Revolution areas of Punjab and Haryana, women spend far less time on these tasks.

Kerala is another example where female literacy rates are high – and where biomass is highly available thanks to the tropical humid environment. Women in Kerala rarely spend more than an hour collecting basic needs like fuel, fodder and water and their work burden is much less than that of women in most other parts of India. If women in Kerala had to spend as much time collecting basic needs as women do in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, would they not have been kept out of school to perform crucial household activities?

If some of these surmises prove to be true, then clearly the spread of women's education will depend on how fast people can be pulled out of a subsistence economy so they can more easily buy water and kerosene, instead of fetching water and firewood, or on how speedily their environment can be regenerated so that the work burden on the women is reduced.

Apart from these possibilities, educationists also need to look at other linkages between the environment and education systems. ■

Anil Agarwal is Director of the Centre for Science and the Environment in Delhi.

Sanjeev Saith

Pakistan: opening c

Rami Chhabra reports

A dozen young women, heads dutifully covered by the ubiquitous chador, squat in a circle on a durry spread out on the veranda of a mountain-home. The sunlight filtering through chilgoza trees bounces off the bright blue First Aid kits clutched in their laps; they talk, turn by turn, in soft voices that strain hearing. Chalk-written on the blackboard at one end are the words: Girl Child Project Supervisors Meeting. Scarcely a picture of revolutionary change.

But this is Dhalgram, 40 kilometres north of Islamabad in the Murree Hills. Unescorted women are seldom seen in rural Pakistan. And these young women have walked several miles across lonely hillsides, in groups or alone, to attend the monthly meeting.

Through hard struggles they have gained the limited role of *Baiji*, aunt/elder sister, the honorific title that signifies the community's sanction and access to the young adolescent girls, seldom permitted out of family sight.

Effervescent Tahira leads the way deeper and deeper into the valley to see the "home schools" and handiwork of her project-wards – the below 20 girl-leaders. Here, as elsewhere, there is the flurry of needlework, a nursery school or two for little children, a sewing or literacy class for older girls, vegetables in small gardens ... small but concrete proofs of the girls' constructive involvement.

Just seven years ago, at the start of the Girl Child Project's pilot, Tahira was a tongue-tied newly-widowed mother of a six-month baby who had never interacted outside her home and sullenly resentful of 'workshops' which required her to talk to outsiders. Today, everyone in the area is in obvious awe of her. They talk of how she could force a village panchayat (council meeting) to be called and to secure a public apology alongside a token payment from her own brother for falsely maligning her character, when earlier she had been abandoned without a penny. Tahira is now troubleshooter-in-chief for any vulnerable woman in this community.

Sanjeev Saith

But more than Tahira it is Zerbin – a trained girl child leader whose home-based school we visit in Java at the valley base – who appears to attract the others as a role model. Zerbin's project-honed inter-personal skills have just landed her a full-time job as an extension worker in the National Rural Support Programme – an assignment that will fetch a decent salary of 1,800 rupees. Zerbin's marriage has been recently arranged. Diffidently yet proudly, she confides that the negotiations have secured her future husband's acceptance to live in her widowed mother's home so that she can continue to help with three younger siblings – an outrageously unconventional arrangement in patriarchal Pakistan.

"We can achieve much more through co-operation, nothing through confrontation" they tell me sagely.

The Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP) is only too aware of the need to tread carefully, if its newly-focused concern with sexual health is not to backfire.

"Hijab" – the protective veil – "is an important Islamic concept", points out Dr Attiya Inayatullah, FPAP's founder and President of IPPF. "It symbolises much more than the physical veil covering the woman, it is the veil of privacy this culture insists must exist around the individual and the family. This cannot be torn. At the same time we are committed to providing scientific information regarding sex education to safeguard the young."

PAI

Above: Schoolgirls, Pakistan

Left: She wants to be a doctor but is not sure that she will be able to complete her studies

hinks in the armour

"But what if afterwards, your fiancé refuses or if he asks you to stop your work?" I probe. "When you do good things how can anyone stop you?" responds Zerbin, simply. Then, with quiet confidence that draws a round of applause from the circle listening : "Even if that were to happen, I will win him over with love. When a woman sets her mind to do something, it is always possible. And I am very capable now."

Assertiveness is high on the externally-funded GCP's training agenda. But in the field, influenced by the practicality of everyday existence, trainers and trainees emphasise pragmatic techniques of seeking one's way.

Days later, in the confines of a room in the cloistered Jogiwara mohalla within the ancient walled city of Peshawar, a city sitting uneasily in the shadow of Afghanistan, Khosar Malik – the youngest of seven sisters and one still younger brother, tells how in the normal course she would have had to leave studies on completion of "middle school". None of her older sisters made it beyond the sixth class to the more distant high school. But with Khosar's sensibilities sharpened by the new exposures, she could plead powerfully not to be denied the benefits of the higher education.

"I convinced my parents they had been wrong to deprive my older sisters and allayed their fears for my own well-being," she reveals. Khosar is now in college.

There are other fundamental concerns that will need attention, if dreams are not to sour. Started in the early nineties with the training of 500 girls/young women in 10 pilot locations, GCP has since been upscaled to a canvas of approximately 10,000 girls in 200 locations. Currently, it is in the throes of another expansion to further triple its outreach within the next two years, and possibly for the incorporation of the model within national plans. As such it undoubtedly constitutes a great idea whose time has truly come. Its major weakness, however, is a surprisingly slender support base to ground its challenging vision in an exceptionally difficult terrain.

Each local initiative picks 50 girls, one each from a household, after separate meetings with men and women in the community to prepare the ground and identify the girl-volunteers. Through an intensive five-day orientation workshop the selected girls are sensitised to their own and community problems. Thereafter, the Primary Girl-leaders receive a few limited inputs: basically, each one participates further in one of three workshops, each of a few days duration only and mostly conducted by a single trainer from the project, to receive basic information and some skills either in health, education or micro-entrepreneur activities. Each "trained girl-leader" is then expected to conduct relay training to share her learning experience with two others from her group – and also to motivate two other girls in the community to take up some joint activity for self-improvement or community work.

Utopian though the approach may be it has undoubtedly struck a spark. Zerbin, Khosar and hundreds of others like them testify to latent inner fires ignited. They are vying to participate – and there is now spreading community support. However, the building of expertise in complex health, education and economic needs is difficult in such short exposures. Further, in the absence of strong infrastructural support to link activities to existing government programmes and non-exploitative market mechanisms the effort cannot upscale. As the needlework lovingly done piles up or is sold at a pittance, the little patch greened, there is the questioning beginning – to what end?

But there are any number of grass-root innovations now being sparked in Pakistan by a vibrant women's movement that is particularly strong on human rights, while social activist organisations are taking up women's and girls' causes as a key area. FPAP, Pakistan's oldest and best endowed community-based organisation dealing with women, with an enviable volunteer force and a dedicated core staff, is networking with other organisations. A new education policy has just been unfolded that lays emphasis on girls education, but with more than 35,000 ghost primary schools found in Punjab alone there is an uphill task ahead to ginger up the system. ■

While girls are closing the gender gap in education in many countries, disparities persist in most developing regions. **Shanti Conly** reports on the problem and some promising solutions.

Bruce Paton/ Panos Pictures

Gender gaps

The girls at the high school in Lahore, Pakistan, pointed proudly to the colourful posters on the drab white-washed walls, illustrating the importance of education in their eyes. One poster showed four girls, arms linked, breaking through a brick wall towards the sun. Another depicted two doors unchained to reveal a girl ascending a stairway; at the top, written in calligraphy and bathed in light, was the word *ta'lim* – meaning education in the local Urdu language.

The girls who painted these inspirational posters did not need a scientific study to understand the impact of education on a woman's quality of life. Still, studies all around the world agree that the more schooling a girl has, the brighter her future. Education opens the door to a healthier, more prosperous and productive life. Women with more schooling have a greater say over all aspects of their lives, including decisions about contraception and childbearing, and have fewer, healthier children than their less-educated sisters. But Shireen Jejeebhoy, author of a recent book on education and reproductive behaviour, cautions that especially in male-dominated societies where the status of women is very low, girls probably need at least six to seven years of schooling to reap the full benefits of education in all spheres of life.

"Educating girls is absolutely one of the best investments a country can make," says Maris O'Rourke, Director of Education for the World Bank. Research sponsored by the Bank suggests that, in several Asian countries, expanded education of girls has contributed to greater labour force participation, productivity and economic growth.

> *"Educating girls is absolutely one of the best investments a country can make."*
>
> Maris O'Rourke, Director of Education for the World Bank

Primary schooling

Yet in much of the world, women and girls remain at a disadvantage in access to education. Of almost one billion illiterate people in the world, two-thirds are women. In some countries, *more than three out of four women* cannot read or write. Low literacy, of course, reflects limited access to education in the *past*, rather than the *current* situation for school-age girls. But even today, some 60 per cent of the roughly 135 million primary school-age children who are not enrolled in school are girls. In almost every region, fewer girls than boys attend school, and many girls who do go to school attend only briefly and receive a negligible education.

However, over the past several decades, the world has made remarkable progress towards expanding access to education, particularly for girls. The *proportion* of all children enrolled in school has doubled over the last 40 years, a formidable achievement in light of rapid population growth. Within this larger context, girls' enrollment has increased at least as fast as that of boys, narrowing or almost closing the gender gap in enrollment in many countries.

Today, virtually all girls and boys are enrolled in primary school in Latin America and East Asia, where gender differentials in primary schooling are non-existent or very small. However, a significant gender gap remains at the primary level in the Arab states, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. South Asia has seen significant increases in the proportion of both boys and girls enrolled, but has made little progress towards eliminating sex differentials. In all other regions, the gender gap has narrowed, including in the Arab world.

Striking example

Oman is a striking example of such progress. In 1970, of some 6,900 children enrolled in primary school, only 16 per cent were girls, reflecting the conservatism of the country's ruler at the time. After more progressive leadership took over, the number of girls in primary school rose to over 147,500 in 1995, 48 per cent of all students.

However, girls' primary enrollment rates are still very low in some of the world's poorest countries, where boys' rates are low as well. The gender gap tends to be greatest in such settings – because of both culture and poverty, boys are more likely to fill limited available school places. In 1995, fewer than half of all girls attended primary school in 10 African countries and in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. In Afghanistan, only a third of girls were in primary school in 1995; the current Taliban regime has banned girls from going to school altogether.

The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa is of special concern. Some African coun-

EDUCATION FOR HEALTH

At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, in 1994, and the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) in Beijing, in 1995, the global community resolved to "protect and promote the rights of adolescents to sexual and reproductive health information and services".

Both platforms of action had a special section on the needs of the girl child and reproductive health education was one of the key determined needs. However, in most countries the educational system is ambivalent about imparting sex education, and parents are embarrassed or do not communicate any reproductive health information to their children, especially daughters, *writes Seema Chauhan*.

Reproductive health information – in the form of family life or life planning education – can be provided through schools, community centres, at clubs, where girls are employed and other places where they gather. Many of these programmes can involve girls themselves as trained educators, counsellors and promoters.

Right now – when the youth cohort of one billion is the largest it has ever been – there is an urgent need for the global community to protect and promote the rights of in this area of their lives. Adolescents, 83 per cent of whom live in developing countries, are vulnerable to sexual assault, rape and prostitution, too-early pregnancy and child-bearing, infertility, anaemia, genital mutilation, malnutrition, unsafe abortion and reproductive tract infections (RTI), including STDs and HIV/AIDS. Today girls are maturing so much more quickly. They must have access to information and services to protect and promote their own sexual and reproductive health rights.

Seema Chauhan is Director of CEDPA's Better Life Options Program, which develops curricula and conducts training in programme design for adolescent girls and for education.

Left top: Finding a place to do homework, Botswana
Below right: Girl pupil at a school run by Hizbollah, Beirut

and gains

tries have made great strides in primary education. But several of the most populous countries have experienced precipitous declines in enrollment rates for *both girls and boys*, and in some cases in the actual number of children enrolled, as a result of deteriorating economic conditions, the introduction of school fees and rapid population growth. The gender gap has narrowed only because enrollment rates for boys have fallen more than those for girls. Moreover, the total number of out-of-school children – both girls and boys – is projected to double from 41 million in 1990 to 83 million in 2015 – including 45 million girls. Prospects for achieving universal primary education in the region appear dim.

Secondary education

Over the past decade, secondary enrollment rates for both boys and girls have risen even more rapidly than those for primary schooling. For all developing countries, the proportion of girls enrolled rose from 31 to 44 per cent, while boys' enrollment also increased, from 44 to 54 per cent. The gains in the proportion of boys and girls enrolled has been most striking in East Asia, where the proportion of children in secondary school rose from 42 to 62 per cent between 1985 and 1995. However, at the secondary level, a gender gap remains in most countries – except in Latin America and a few countries in other regions where girls' enrollment rates, for reasons not well understood, are higher than those for boys.

Still, the overall level of secondary enrollment in developing countries remains low – on average, just under half of all children attend secondary school. In Africa in 1995, only 24 per cent of school-age children were enrolled in secondary school; in Burundi, Chad, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger and Tanzania, *fewer than 5 per cent of girls* were in secondary school.

Gender disparities also exist in completion of each level of schooling and continuation to the next level. One estimate suggests that two-thirds of drop-outs in the first four years are girls. In Ghana, a similar number of girls and boys enter primary school, but boys outnumber girls 3 to 2 at the secondary level, and 5 to 1 in higher education.

Gender differentials in education persist for several reasons. In many societies, parents still prefer to invest their limited resources in educating their sons, whom they see as having better income-earning opportunities and as more likely to support them in their old-age. School expenses for girls, especially uniforms and transportation, are often more costly than for boys. Girls are also often kept home to fetch water and firewood and care for younger siblings.

In societies which place a premium on the chastity of girls, parents are often reluctant to have girls travel long distances to school, sit next to boys or be taught by male teachers. The mass rapes at a school in Kenya some years ago vividly highlight the real concerns parents often have for the physical safety of their daughters. Throughout Africa and Latin America, teenage pregnancy is a rising cause of school drop-outs; in Botswana, teenage pregnancy accounts for 60 to 90 per cent of girls who drop out of school. And in Africa, adolescent girls who lose their parents to AIDS are dropping out in increasing numbers because they cannot pay school fees, need to work and must care for younger siblings.

Strategies

Experience suggests a combination of approaches can help improve girls' educational participation. These include:

- Building more schools, especially in rural areas, and expanding the overall number of school places.
- Providing "girl-friendly" facilities – single sex schools, boundary walls or even separate toilets can make a difference.
- Increasing the number of female teachers.
- Instituting scholarship programmes to cut the cost of schooling for girls, especially for poor families.
- Improving the quality and relevance of education to encourage girls to complete at least six to seven years schooling.
- Educating parents about the importance of sending girls to school.
- Providing sexual health education and services to prevent teen pregnancies – and encouraging pregnant girls to stay in school.
- Structuring school schedules to accommodate the need for girls' assistance at home.

Margaret Lycette, Director of the Women in Development Office at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), points out that where these strategies have been employed, they have brought rapid results.

"In Malawi, girls' primary enrollment rates rose from 55 to 95 per cent following a campaign supported by USAID to emphasise the importance of educating girls, together with the elimination of school fees. A scholarship programme for girls in Bangladesh increased the proportion of girls enrolled in secondary school by 60 per cent in just three years, while also reducing dropout rates." Lycette concludes, "By adopting such strategies, other countries too can ensure that girls and women become full partners in education and in the development process." ■

Shanti Conly is director of policy research at Population Action International (PAI) and author of numerous PAI publications. Before joining PAI, she spent ten years overseas working with family planning and other development programmes.

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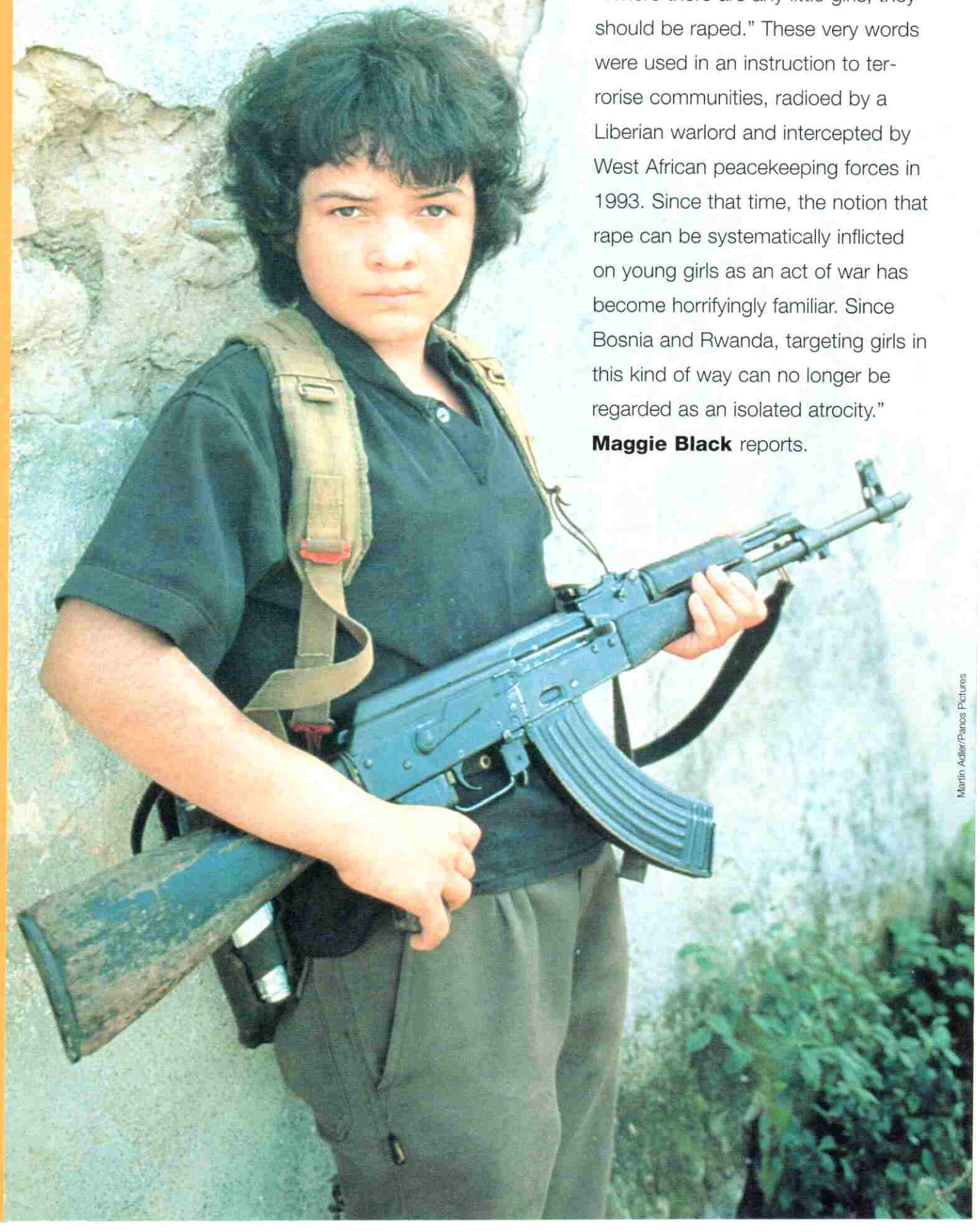
Girls and war: an

"Where there are any little girls, they should be raped." These very words were used in an instruction to terrorise communities, radioed by a Liberian warlord and intercepted by West African peacekeeping forces in 1993. Since that time, the notion that rape can be systematically inflicted on young girls as an act of war has become horrifyingly familiar. Since Bosnia and Rwanda, targeting girls in this kind of way can no longer be regarded as an isolated atrocity." **Maggie Black** reports.



Martin Adler/Panos Pictures

extra vulnerability

Today in Northern Uganda, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is still waging a ten-year-old guerrilla campaign against the government of Yoweri Museveni. To replenish their fighting forces, they kidnap children – young boys and girls. Up to now, between 6,000 and 10,000 youngsters have been taken. The thinking behind such barbarity is the very antithesis of the assumption that childhood should be protected from the impacts of a conflict for which they bear absolutely no responsibility. The very suggestibility and malleability which are attributes of childish vulnerability have been co-opted as instruments of war.

Girls kidnapped by the LRA have been made to become the 'wives' of warlord leaders. A division commander is entitled to four such 'wives', a brigade commander to three and a commanding officer to two 'wives'. Those in demand are the ones 'with firm, young breasts'. Those with 'flat and less firm breasts' are abused, flogged and chased off naked to go back to their homes since they are considered 'useless harlots'.

The girls who have been rescued or have managed to run away are deeply traumatised – and often suffering from severe neglect. They are underfed, battered, with sores and scars from beatings all over their bodies. They have lice, scabies, malaria and foot injuries from long marches, diarrhoea and respiratory complaints. And since they are 'spoiled', they suffer from an acute sense of shame. Without careful counselling for both the children and their families, they may be rejected as unfit for society. On their side, the children often feel deep resentment against their parents for not having somehow protected them from their dreadful ordeal.

These horrors have obliged the humanitarian community to recognise the particular vulnerability of girls in situations of pervasive civil war. Refugee camps and centres for the displaced tend to foster rampant sexual behaviour and informal prostitution, with special risks to adolescent girls. Not only may sexual relations be forced upon them, but they are exposed to sexually-transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. This has led to the introduction of measures for female security, in the design of camps, the location of toilet facilities, and the provision of lighting.

In war-torn countries such as Burundi and Somalia, families in camps have taken their own measures to protect female honour. They marry their girls off at a very young age – often to militia men as a bargaining chip to secure favours or family protection. But this, too, is an abuse of girls' rights. Their situation is one of servitude, perhaps for the rest of their lives. And they can expect to bear children at an age well below that when childbirth is safe. Their bodies are too immature, increasing the risks to both mother and child.

Supporting role

Although boys are more often targeted for recruitment as fighters, girls who are conscripted – voluntarily or by force – into armed groups are not immune from using guns. More often, though, they serve in supporting roles. They transport materials, cook, help in the looting of villages. And their conditions of life are often no less severe than those of boys. They undergo long forced marches. They live without proper food, shelter, care or clothing. Because of the remote locations in which rebels tend to hide out, they may be exposed to freezing mountain temperatures or other environmental hazards.

Even in cases where girls remain with their families, and their families are able to protect them, they may face special difficulties as a consequence of war. Where a conflict is a long, slow-burning affair, disrupting society but not entirely destroying it, the extra strains imposed on the family are often ultimately shouldered by the women and girls. In African countries, the menfolk often go off to fight, leaving the womenfolk to shoulder all the agricultural and livestock burdens. Girls will be the first to be withdrawn from school – if they ever went in the first place – to help cultivate, scavenge, graze the sheep, or do whatever is necessary to keep the household going.

Where health services have collapsed, girls and women will have to tend the wounded and provide whatever they can in the way of health and nursing care. Meanwhile, reproductive hazard means that they are far more likely to suffer than boys or men from lack of access to health services. Infant and maternal mortality rates tend to skyrocket in times of conflict.

Legal instruments exist under which rape as a weapon of war can be prosecuted. In reality, cases never occur. There is now a move afoot to make systematic rape a specific war crime. The kidnapping and forced recruitment of children into combat roles should be similarly designated. Legal and human rights instruments may provide only a notional 'armour of right'. But they do represent an attempt to re-establish moral norms. Warrior codes have traditionally been used to protect women and children in times of war – in every society around the world. Their disintegration is among the very worst characteristics of today's civil wars. ■

Maggie Black is a writer on international children's issues. She has just completed a report for UNICEF on *Children in Conflict*.

Left: Thirteen-year-old girl soldier, El Salvador
Below: Young girl recruits at Dac'Cong (SAS) camp, Vietnam

Tim Page/Still Pictures

Voices of Girls 1: India

Millions of young girls suffer from the effects of child labour in India, as **Sharmila Joshi** reports after a year of research in the State of Maharashtra.

India's 'nowh

When the sun is rising over the millet fields around Temburne village, in India's west coast state of Maharashtra, Dhurpata Kasle sets out to graze a buffalo and some goats.

Kasle's workday began at dawn. Before leaving for the fields, she has already helped her mother make dung-cakes, swept their home, filled water from the village well and washed the clothes.

In the fields, the 12-year-old keeps watch on the animals, stops them from straying into the crops, gives them water and dry grass and herds them back by six every evening. In between, she sits in the shade of a tree, to eat a lunch of dry bread and chutney.

At times, grazing work – which earns her between Rs 2500 (US$64) to Rs 6000 (US$153) a year, or payment in grains or a goat from the cattle owner – is not available. Then, with a sickle, Kasle plucks weeds for Rs 20 (51 US cents) a day on the landowner's fields. When there is no work in the village, she and her parents, both landless labourers, temporarily migrate to other parts of the state, to labour at quarries or brick kilns.

A few hundred kilometres from where Kasle is working, in Aurangabad district, Vinita Chauhan is having a similar day. She has woken at four, helped with the household chores, and by seven set off with her family to the sugarcane fields. Here, the 11-year-old picks the long cane stalks, cuts them with a sickle, ties them into bundles, and carries them to a bullock cart.

"I would like to go to school," she says, "but if I don't work, how will we manage?" Chauhan's family, like millions

WFS

Left: Girls making pencils, India
Main picture: Migrant Nepali girl picking tea in Darjeeling, India

ere' girls

of landless labourers across the country, migrates from the village for eight months every year, looking for work during peak agricultural cycles.

Most such families leave the boys behind to continue with their schooling. Girls are taken along because leaving them may not be safe and because their education has low priority.

In the multitude of fields across India, girls under 14 toil from dawn to dusk. Agricultural workers, boys and girls, constitute up to 85 per cent of the child labour force in the country. But because the work done at home is non-remunerative and labour in the fields forms part of the vast unorganised sector, they are not included as child labourers in official estimates.

Boys also work in the fields, running ploughs, cutting ready crops, digging hard soil. But, in purely relative terms, they lead a better life. "In families here, the status of girls is secondary," says Machindra Gojame of the People's Institute of Rural Development, a non-government organisation (NGO) based in Ahmedpur.

"The sons don't do housework in addition to field work. They have better chances of being sent to school," Gojame adds. "They eat first, the daughters often eat stale leftovers. Unlike girls, they get time to rest and play."

One statistical profile on child labour, commissioned by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), calls child workers the "nowhere children": a category of the child population which is neither at school nor reported to be economically active.

Girls who work from home tend to be the most invisible. However, girls also work in large numbers in some industrial units in the unorganised sector. For example, of the 45,000 working children in the Sivakasi match industry in Tamil Nadu, approximately 90 per cent are girls under 14.

Girls are found in large numbers in a range of industries: the gem polishing trade in Jaipur, the coir industry in Kerala, the lock-making industry in Aligarh, the brassware industry in Moradabad, and the zari (gold thread) embroidery industry of Varanasi.

Other girls work from home. Like Sazia Tabassum, eight, who rolls a mixture of black charcoal powder and tree gum onto thin sticks to make *agarbattis* (incense sticks). In stifling rooms in the slums of Nagpur, a city in eastern Maharashtra, women and girls sit rolling *agarbattis* through the day to earn Rs 5 (about 13 US cents) for 1,000 pieces.

In Sinnar, a cigarette-producing area in central Maharashtra, women and girls roll *beedis* (leaf cigarettes) at home to earn Rs 30 (less than US$1) for 1,000 pieces. In Misalgaon, Mandakini Chowdhry, 12, goes to morning school and rolls *beedis* through the afternoons. "I would prefer to go out and play," she says, "but my mother needs help."

In the cities too, such workers remain largely "invisible". No one knows, for instance, how many under-14 girls are domestic workers in Bombay. Patsy Khan, a social worker, believes the number could be 200,000. Again, no one knows how many work as rag-pickers, fish-cleaners, beggars. According to a study, at least 500,000 under-15 children in India are sex workers.

Thus, all estimates of the number of child workers in India fall short of the actual figure for a number of reasons: multiplicity of definitions, diverse sources of data, and lack of information on the vast unorganised sector which employs the most children.

Groups concerned with children's rights differentiate between child labour and child work. Child labour is that form of work which is detrimental to the growth and development of the child. Family work which interferes with a child's education, recreation or physical, mental or moral health, is also considered child labour. Most working girls in India would, by this definition, be classified as child labourers.

Estimates of the number of child labourers in India vary – from 20 million to 100-odd million. The Union Labour Ministry claims only 20 million children under 14 work in the country. The Operations Research Group, an NGO, put the figure at 44 million in 1983.

In 1991, India had a child population (0-14) of 296.9 million, nearly half of them girls. With over 50 per cent of the population living in abject poverty, it would not be incorrect to estimate that at least half the child population works – part-time or full-time.

Most girl labourers in Bombay live in unsanitary slums or on the pavement, in conditions which threaten their health. Bina Nikalji, 11 and a rag-picker, lives in a slum atop a former hillock of garbage, adjacent to the city's dumping ground. Overflowing drains, flies, the stench and toxic fumes from the dump and the nearby highway, constitute Nikalji's daily landscape.

Savita More, 10, a rag-picker, lives in a plastic-and-bamboo hut on a pavement in central Bombay. It takes More and her family over an hour every morning to fill water from a distant tap. Still, when she returns from sifting through rubbish all day, there is never enough water for a proper wash.

When entire lives are geared towards basic survival, nutrition is an alien concept. Sometimes, when she is unbearably hungry, More looks for chicken remnants or rotting fruit in the garbage.

Not surprisingly, malnourishment and illness like fevers, coughs, malaria, scabies and diarrhoea are common. In Maharashtra, almost 1.9 million children below five years are registered as malnourished under the government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS). The number represents the

Jeremy Horner/Panos Pictures

Mark Edwards/Still Pictures

Left: Children making carpets for export, Rajasthan, India

proverbial tip of the iceberg. And Maharashtra is one of India's more "developed" states.

In poor health already, girl child labourers face various occupational hazards: rag-pickers cut themselves on rust metal and pieces of glass in the garbage, domestic workers suffer body aches from washing clothes and swabbing floors, agricultural labourers have to confront cuts, heat-strokes and stomach cramps. Sexual molestation is also a constant threat.

"I constantly have the *agarbatti* powder in my nose, my mouth, nails, eyes, everywhere," says Sujata Khobragade, 10, who rolls incense sticks in a Nagpur slum. Chandrabhaga Tidule, 11, of Hasrani village in Latur district, says, "My body aches with constantly squatting to weed and moving on my haunches. The heat is intense. I feel like not going to the fields at all but I have to go everyday."

A recent analysis of data related to 19 states from the 1992-93 National Family Health Survey of India, says girls are breast-fed for shorter periods than boys, are less likely to be vaccinated or to receive treatment for diseases such as diarrhoea, fever and acute respiratory infections. Child mortality in the 0-4 age group is 43 per cent higher for females (at 42 per 1000) than for males (29 per 1000).

Many girls, already in poor health, are married between the ages of 14-16. They bear children while still young and malnourished themselves. An upswing of female deaths in the age-group 15-19 years indicates the high mortality rate of teenage mothers. Over 100,000 women die in India every year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Education is another casualty in lives spent trying to survive. Work, poverty and social attitudes towards a daughters' education, ensure low literacy rates for girls. In Maharashtra, only 39 per cent of girls in the 4-14 age group are educated. In 1991, according to UNICEF, 60.8 per cent of India's girls aged 8-plus were illiterate.

If a girl does manage to continue school alongside work, she may be compelled to drop out after Class 7. Most Indian villages do not have schools beyond this level. The costs of commuting to another school, the utility of her labour and concern about her safety ensure a high drop out.

Yet, Article 45 of the Indian Constitution mandates, "free and compulsory education to all children until they complete the age of 14 years."

Like such Constitutional provisions, the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 also does not work. It only focuses on a handful of hazardous occupations where child labour is prohibited, ignoring the ill-effects of other forms of child labour. There have been almost no convictions of employers under this law, although it is flouted routinely.

Punishing employers is not the solution. Child labour thrives in India because of social inequity, official neglect and anti-poor policies. For instance, despite the terrible literacy rate, the five-year plan allocations for education have been falling: from 7.83 per cent in the first Five-Year Plan to 3.8 per cent in the seventh Five-Year Plan. "As the problems of her children's education grew more," writes journalist P. Sainath in a book about India's poor, "India spent less and less on them."

It is often said than unless India's enormous poverty is reduced, child labour will continue. But, as Justice P.N. Bhagwati, veteran jurist, says, "It is a myth that child labour is the result of widespread poverty. Child labour is one of the factors which perpetuate poverty. It is not right to condone it as a necessary concomitant of poverty."

Child rights activists advocate free and compulsory education for all children under 14 as one imperative solution to child labour. If implemented, this would withdraw children from the labour force. The experience of several countries proves this to be true, points out Myron Weiner, eminent American political scientist.

Enforced education must be accompanied by other measures: making the education system more relevant to employment, addressing the problem of adult employment, which is related to child labour, appropriate rural development, sensible budgetary allocations. But, 50 years after becoming independent, India still denies freedom to the majority of its children. ■

Sharmila Joshi is a special correspondent with the Women's Feature Service in Mumbai (Bombay), India. Her research last year in Maharashtra was funded by a fellowship from the National Foundation of India.

SARITA'S STORY

Soon after coming to Bombay, Sarita Wagh was brought to a public hospital, battered and bruised. Her back was covered with scabs and wounds, her face black and blue, arms swollen, palms branded with a hot spoon.

Six months earlier, Wagh, about 12, had left her village in Ratnagiri district in south Maharashtra, with a villager who had fixed for her a job as a maid. "I did not want to come," she recalled, "I had heard other girls in the village say being a domestic worker can be horrible." But, Sarita's father is dead, her mother is missing and her grandmother sent her off.

So, Wagh, who has never been to school, left her home. Instead of working in the village she went to work in the city. For Rs 300 (US$ 7.9), she laboured for a family of four: a couple who are both bank employees and their two small children. She washed pots and pans and clothes, swabbed, cooked, fed the children.

Some weeks after this new life started, the violence began. The madam flew into a rage over a small mistake Wagh made. She started hitting the girl with a rolling pin. After that day, the violence did not stop. "If neighbours intervened, she would say it is none of your business, she is our servant," says Wagh.

"She started beating me every morning and evening, with a stick, with slippers, she would punch me, burn me with a hot ladle. At times, her husband would also fling shoes at me. If I cried out, she would stuff my mouth with a piece of cloth. If I asked for food, she would singe my palm with a steaming spoon. She would not let me use the toilet or bathe. A neighbour gave me food and I bathed when she was away at work."

She could not write home since she cannot write. She was not allowed to step out of the small flat in Mahim, north Bombay. The neighbour who gave her food and initially intervened, refused to mediate further. "I kept wondering how to escape. I would beg them to stop beating me and ask to be sent home. I was very frightened," recalls Wagh.

One day, she was sent on a rare visit to a nearby shop. The woman shopkeeper saw her condition and called Childline, an emergency hotline for children in distress. Volunteers and the police intervened and Wagh was brought to hospital.

Wagh's experience of violent abuse may be exceptional, not every domestic worker is treated so brutally. But paid domestic work is labour that innumerable girls perform for years, with no hope of occupational mobility.

Wagh's options, even after being rescued, were limited: notorious state-run remand homes or back to her village. With luck, a shelter would be located for her. "I want to go back to my village," she said. "But what will I do there? Maybe I'll stay on and look for another job." In many cases, the next job for girls like Sarita Wagh is prostitution.

Sharmila Joshi

Voices of Girls 2: Africa
Young widows, tragic voices

Of the millions of child marriages still common in traditional societies, many end in early widowhood. **Margaret Owen** reports.

No agencies concerned with children have as yet attempted to identify and explore how to eliminate the tragic consequences for many young girls of becoming widows or the daughters of widows. These include, homelessness, poor nutrition, ill health, gender-related violence, child sexual abuse, withdrawal from school, debt bondage, exploited labour, servile forced marriage, child prostitution, and life as a street girl.

Widowhood may mean the loss of the right due to every child to be a real child, to laugh, play and learn and have hopes for the future.

These children are victims of problems that are widespread in changing societies where tradition rubs shoulders with modernity and where widows are at the bottom of the pile. Subject to the whims of their relatives (usually on the dead husband's side), treated as chattels, unable to inherit, daughters bear the brunt of this cruel discrimination.

"My husband died when I was 16. Now no one wants me..."

Hauwa was 10-years-old when her father gave her in a *sadaka* marriage to a man old enough to be her grandfather. This practice among the Hausa/Falani ethnic groups of Northern Nigeria cements the friendships between men. It is hard to eradicate. The girl child is a gift, no bride price of cattle passes. With such a big age gap many girls are left as young widows.

Hauwa, now 20, remembers. "I ran away three times but my parents returned me. My old husband threatened he would cut off my legs if I tried again so I had to stay. The labour was long and hard when at 13 I gave birth to his child. The birth attendant cut me wrongly and I was very sick in the hospital. My husband died when I was 16. Now no one wants me for I never properly recovered. I suffer from the fistula*. Because of this my birth family rejected me and now no other man wants me as wife."

Even had she had not fallen victim to this unpleasant condition her parents would have been hard pressed to find a second suitable husband for her. The old men prefer the little sisters on the brink of puberty who are virgins to any widow however young.

Child marriage continues unabated in several regions. In Africa among many communities stricken with the AIDS pandemic, it may even be on the increase. A variety of programmes seek ways of promoting a later age for marriage by encouraging girls to stay in school (a recent edict of the Nigerian state of Niger decrees prosecution of anyone who withdraws a young girl from school for the purpose of marriage), but although the outcome of so many of these unions is child widowhood there is little awareness-raising about this issue. It is bad enough to be an adult widow in Africa and on the sub-continent, but to have reached this ignominious status in childhood is profoundly cruel. The knowledge that a girl has no father to protect her may make her more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Modern Age of Marriage legislation, enacted by many countries to comply with obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), merely sets down statutory limits to marriage without the consent of parents. Child marriages arranged by the parents fall outside their remit and so continue unregulated.

In several African countries widows gave common reasons for withdrawing their daughters from school for marriage. "It's not only because we have no cash for school fees and clothes. There is another reason. The young men offer them rides on their bicycles because it is a long walk. The boys are bad with them and so too are the teachers. We would rather they are married off before such bad things happen," explained a group of widows in Zimbabwe.

From Uganda, Najai tells her story. "I was married twice. First when I was 11-years-old. My father had died, and my uncles took me from my mother and threw her out of the village. They said my brothers and I belonged to them now. I never saw my mother again. They gave me to this old man whose wife had died. He gave them some money. I was so frightened. I had not yet had my first period and I did not know anything. I cried for my mother and for my school. When the uncles took me to his house I tried to hide under the bed, but my husband pulled me out. He was old and ugly. He raped me and beat me. I worked all day in the field, and collected water and firewood for him. He was lame in the leg and ill. He died soon after, and the baby I was expecting died too. Now the uncles will marry me again, but I think it will be to another old man."

Najai was afflicted with a double curse: the daughter of a widow and a widow herself. The second husband chosen for her was a young man but mentally handicapped and epileptic needing constant care. Najai may soon be a widow for a second time and she is still a child. "After he dies I want to go back to my school and learn so I can be a teacher and help other girls to have work, not these marriages."

Here is another story from Uganda. Norah, a widow's daughter, aged 14, was sent away by her mother to look after an uncle with a sick wife. In return he would pay her school fees. No one told her that the wife was dying of AIDS. The uncle bought her clothes, jewellery and good food. He had sex with her. His wife died. He became ill. Still he did not tell her the truth. Eventually she found out when her child was born HIV positive. Now she is quite alone, infected also, with a sick child who may die. She belongs to TASO, the Ugandan self-help AIDS organisation and works to help the daughters of other widows get shelter, and education and counselling.

The Beijing Platform for Action devotes many paragraphs to the discrimination suffered by the girl child, but not once is child widowhood addressed. It is encouraging that at the 1998 UN Commission on the Status of Women the EU countries agreed that "widows" are to be given special attention as an "emerging" issue in relation to all four themes, including the Girl Child. Now it is time for UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO, and indeed all agencies and NGOs working on children's rights to begin to gather more than anecdotal information on this neglected topic. ■

Margaret Owen is a women's rights lawyer and Director of the London-based charity, Empowering Widows in Development. Her book *A World of Widows* was published by Zed Books, London, 1996. See also *Widows: Life After Death*, published by Index on Censorship, London, 1998, £8.99/US$9.99

** The names of the girls mentioned in this article have been changed in order to protect their identity.*

** Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVD) may occur after obstructed labour. In developing countries there are many such cases, especially where the mother is very young and the pelvis not fully formed. The leakage from the rectum and/or bladder into the vagina results in a noxious smell. Women suffering VVD are often ostracised by their families.*

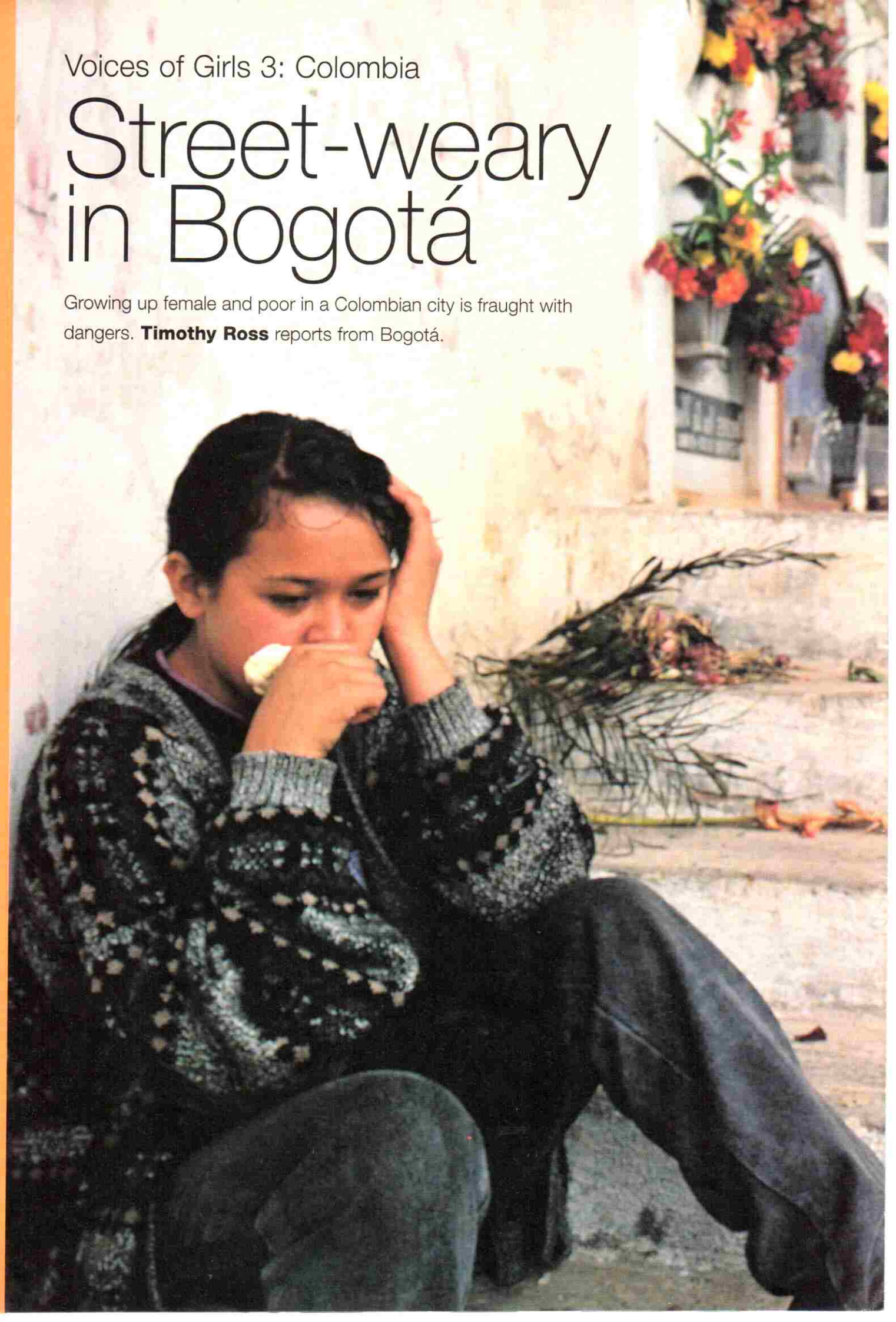
Below: Widows' daughters kept home from school to look after younger siblings

Margaret Owen

Voices of Girls 3: Colombia

Street-weary in Bogotá

Growing up female and poor in a Colombian city is fraught with dangers. **Timothy Ross** reports from Bogotá.



Rural violence in Colombia has generated over a million internal refugees, and displaced people tend to move into the city shack-towns and slum rooming houses where, according to a recent Health Ministry *Study of Mental Health and Consumption of Psychoactive Substances*, the rates of psychotic disorders, alcoholism, drug dependence and violence are highest.

Violence against children is so serious that one-third of all Colombian minors are estimated to suffer physical, psychological or sexual violence, with double that rate in the two lowest social strata. For a small Colombian girl the city is dangerous, and danger starts at home.

Mariza Sanchez is seven, small for her age, and spends the days and most of the night with her mother, 24-year-old Jaqueline, on a corner of Bogotá's Seventh Avenue, washing car windows and selling sweets.

"I have to have her here with me, because when I left her in the rooming house, a neighbour tried to rape her," said Jaqueline, who completed two years of primary school and ran away from home when she was scarcely older than her own daughter is now. "I used to go to school." said Mariza. "I liked school, being with other girls. And I like studying." But after one year Jaqueline could not afford to pay for more schooling, which under the constitution and the education law is universal, obligatory and free. In reality, schooling is so expensive and places so scarce that over a third of Colombian children never complete primary school, with girls dropping out more frequently and at younger ages than boys.

"In the street," says Jaqueline, "there are other dangers for her. She may learn to use drugs which I don't want, I want her to be a young lady, not an urchin." But Mariza is learning street language and behaviour, and the friends she makes are part of a street culture, drug users, beggars and thieves, with many of the girls only three or four years older than her already involved in prostitution.

Sexually abused

Outreach workers from the Renacer Foundation have counted 7,454 girl children in prostitution in the Colombian capital and believe there are at least a thousand more still to be contacted. Their case histories show recurring common factors. Most come from large low income families from the inner city slum districts of Egipto, San Bernardo, Laches and Las Cruces or the immense southern shanty town of Cuidad Bolivar. Many are sexually abused at or even before puberty, usually by the father or stepfather and often with the complicity or tolerance of the mother. Once on the street almost all start using drugs and over 80 per cent are infected with one or more sexually transmitted diseases – 15 per cent with HIV/AIDS.

Deviance is not learned only on the street. Omaira, is a 17-year-old with oval eyes and beauty that makes heads turn. The daughter of severe alcoholics she was put into a children's home at nine by other members of the family for her own protection. "There I met another girl who had already been on the street, and I ran away with her. We went off hitchhiking, but the police stopped us and brought us back to Bogotá. For a long time I lived in a different home, where there were mostly real street children. That's where I started using drugs, through girl friends who taught me."

Biggest danger

Omaira says the biggest danger on the street is rape: "Boys can be raped as well, but for girls it is often the police who take them in and abuse them or rape them." Her own growing drug dependency and downhill slide on the street eventually frightened her so much she came in to Renacer for rehabilitation. Two years later she is a composed, clear thinking young lady, near the top of her class in secondary school and getting ready to go out into the world: "I want to finish school and get a University place to study psychology. Here in the foundation I have changed, mostly through learning about myself, gaining self-respect. A person is treated with realism and with affection. They help you to prepare a project in life for yourself, but to achieve small goals first."

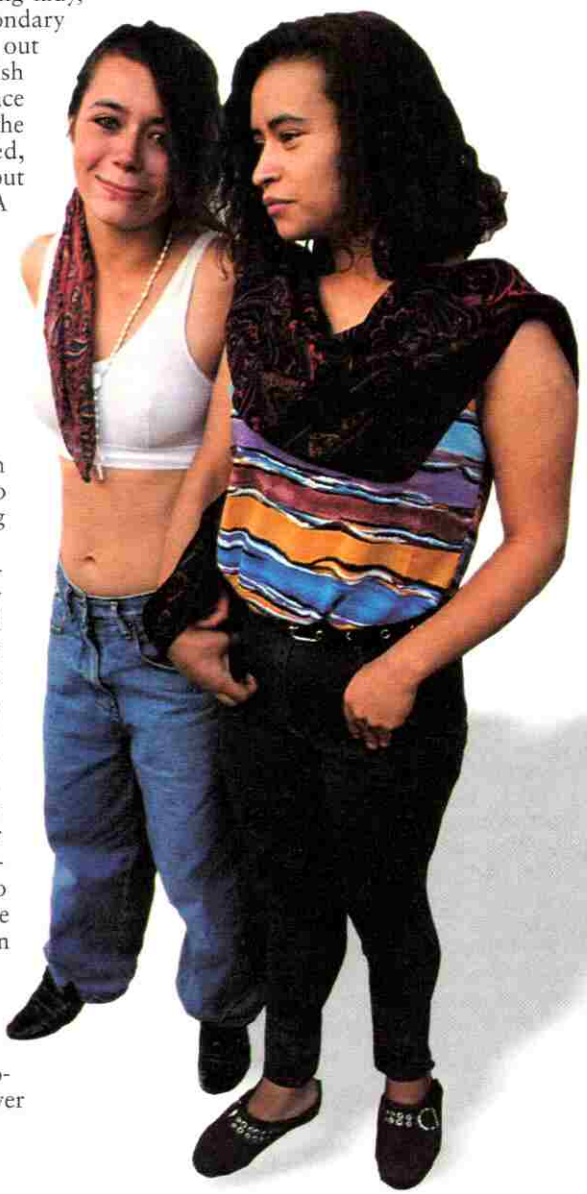
There are few institutions with Renacer's quality of therapy and success rate, but even in the Renacer residential units there are girls for whom the accumulated damage is so great that recovery is very long and slow.

Marly was repeatedly sexually assaulted from an early age, firstly by her uncles and with the connivance of her prostitute mother, whose career she was then obliged to follow. Now a chubby and usually cheerful teenager who likes historical novels and roller-blading, any reminder of her family can trigger uncontrollable manic behaviour or send her plunging into suicidal depression. After one attempt with pills she began psychiatric treatment and the bipolar roller-coaster is beginning to slow down. But, says her therapist, early abuse leaves emotional scar tissue that may never heal completely.

So what more could be done to help vulnerable girls? Official bodies and other organisations working with young girls all have such limited resources that they can do little more than intervene at a late stage to help those already in trouble. There has been no nationwide needs assessment, there is no primary intervention programme to reduce the risks and prevent early abuse in the barrio and at home.

Other frequent criticisms are that the principle juvenile offender and adolescent drug programmes are in the hands of religious orders applying outdated methodologies, with poor results, and that there are so few places available in existing residential treatment units that children frequently have to be turned away. There is, it would seem, a pressing need for a central research and policy body to take initiatives and lead much more ambitious work with children. ■

Timothy Ross is a Bogotá-based journalist specialising in drugs, delinquency and children's rights.



Timothy Ross/The Image Works

Timothy Ross/The Image Works

Associates' news

CHANGING STEP

The UN Population Fund is to support a $20 million programme in 32 counties in China which will provide "comprehensive quality reproductive health services" on a voluntary basis.

The programme marks an important shift in China's family planning programme which has been criticised for imposing strictly-enforced limits on family size. American pro-life campaigners, in particular, have charged the Chinese Government with condoning coercive abortions.

The new programme agreed between UNFPA and China, aims to strengthen and re-focus services to provide broader and more-client centred reproductive health care "based on the principle of free and responsible choice" in the selected counties.

It will include counselling on the benefits and side effects of different contraceptive methods. And it will make available a wide range of methods, diagnose sexually-transmitted diseases and improve infection control in all aspects of reproductive health care.

Thirty per cent of the programme budget will be spent on activities complementing the delivery of reproductive health services, such as the empowerment of women and South-South co-operation, allowing Chinese officials to share experiences with their counterparts in other developing countries.

Under the Reagan and Bush administrations the US Government withdrew its funding from UNFPA on the grounds that UNFPA support to China (not related to abortion) freed up funds for coercive abortion. The new programme has been reviewed and approved by UNFPA's 40-nation Executive Board, which includes the United States.

Julio Etchart/TStill Pictures

CHOOSE A FUTURE

The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), with support from their partners in Africa, Asia and Latin America, has developed a comprehensive family life education training manual for girls aged 12-20, *Choose A Future! Issues and Options for Adolescent Girls.*

While many girls lack choices and options and are restricted by their gender, they have untapped potential, hopes and dreams. The activities in *Choose A Future!* help them to build self-confidence, knowledge and skills that empower girls to shape their own lives.

Choose A Future! has 48 sessions which guide girls in exploring and learning about 12 thematic areas including self identity, career planning, relationships with friends and family, health, puberty, sexuality and reproduction, sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, marriage and parenthood, legal rights and the environment.

The sessions involve girls in activities that help them reflect on and analyse their experiences and develop workable solutions. They are based on the principle that girls have the right and capacity to make choices and to determine their future. The curriculum is designed to be part of a comprehensive programme which offers girls access to education, skills and vocational training, health and reproductive health services, and advocacy with parents, community members and boys in support of meeting needs of girls and their empowerment.

The first "global" edition in English has been adapted and translated into Spanish, Hindi, Nepali, and Arabic. The manual is currently being adapted for use with adolescent boys.

Choose A Future! is on sale at $25. One free copy will be provided to NGOs in the Southern hemisphere. To order contact: CEDPA, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Suite 200, Washington DC 20036, USA. Tel: (+1 202) 667 1142, Fax: (+1 202) 332 4496.

TRAFFICKING GIRLS

Most victims of sexual exploitation in Asia are impoverished girls aged 13-18, and research shows that age to be declining. Girls are kidnapped, lured by promises of jobs or marriage, or sold to traffickers who ship them to urban centres and neighbouring countries.

With these trends in mind, The Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) convened a ground-breaking conference on girls' trafficking last December in Bombay.

Participants reported that while poverty, low education levels and the depressed social status of girls all contribute to the potential supply of girls vulnerable to exploitation, other factors were increasing the demand. Tourism, migrating workers, the lucrative nature of the business, and the myth that HIV cannot be contracted through sexual intercourse with young or virgin girls.

Despite a strong basis in international law, treaties and agreements for the protection of girls and women, conference participants found national laws to be poorly enforced or non-existent. Some laws prohibiting prostitution or illegal migration further criminalise the young victims, without holding their traffickers accountable.

Trafficked or exploited girls face obstacles even after they have been rescued from brothels. They usually have few employable skills, reside far from home or in a foreign country, have poor health including HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases or are stigmatised and not accepted by their families and communities.

Conference participants will report back to CEDPA within a year on implemented recommendations and on a regional lawyers' network. A regional 'Stop Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Day' is to be held on November 28.

A copy of the conference report *Girls' Rights, Society's Responsibilities* is available from CEDPA at the above address. (See film review page 34).

AMAZON 'GIFT'

In an unprecedented step to protect Amazon forests, the Brazilian government has announced its commitment with the World Bank and WWF to establish 62 million acres (25 million hectares) of new protected forest areas by the year 2000. This is the largest conservation move ever in the Amazon.

This commitment is the first outcome of an alliance between the World Bank and WWF to help conserve a network of forests around the world. The alliance aims to help countries set aside 125 million acres of forest in new protected areas, and bring 500 million acres of production forests under independent certification, by the year 2005.

President Cardoso's gift to the Earth represents the first tangible, major accomplishment for the World Bank/WWF alliance. Claude Martin, Director General of WWF-International said it was a "crucial step forward for WWF's Living Planet Campaign in its goal to protect at least 10 per cent of the world's major forest types by the year 2000."

To launch this commitment, President Cardoso signed decrees on April 29 for two new protected areas in the Brazilian Amazon, and one in the Atlantic forest, together totalling 1.5 million acres.

The world's forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Nearly two-thirds of the earth's original forest cover has already been lost. In the past three months, the Brazilian Amazon has lost forest covering an area the size of Belgium to fires. Home to an estimated one-tenth of the world's plant and animal species, the Amazon contains some of the planet's most important tropical habitats.

Contact: Arun Chacko, Press Office, WWF International, Avenue du Mont Blanc, CH-1196 Gland, Switzerland. Tel: (+44 22) 364 9552, Fax: (+41 22) 364 8307, Email: achacko@wwfnet.org

John Maier/Still Pictures

NEW DIRECTION

A new report by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) explores the complex environmental consequences of between rapid population growth in developing countries and high levels of resources consumption in developed countries.

Population Change, Resources and the Environment, written by Robert Livernash and Eric Rodenburg, warns that most governments in developing regions where 90 per cent of future population growth will occur, lack the resources to invest in sound environmental policies to reduce the impact of economic growth.

The report examines different areas of the population/environment equation, including, agriculture, fresh water resources, urban growth and ocean and forest resources.

More than 80 million people are added to the global population each year. To meet their needs more food must be produced, more water must be available for agriculture and other purposes, and more raw materials must be processed to provide shelter. What must be done to safeguard the environment while catering for this extra demand?

The report explores ways in which governments can accommodate human numbers and needs while putting less stress on the environment. Among recommendations, the authors advocate recycling processed materials, phasing out subsidies that distort the environmental costs of scare resources and better forest and fisheries management.

The authors also note that where population has declined in developing countries child survival and educational levels have increased, family planning programmes have been introduced and the prospects for women have improved.

On a similar theme PRB, has produced a data sheet entitled *Population & Environment Dynamics* which provides a summary of connections between population and water, croplands, energy and air. It also includes an up-to-date table with essential demographic, health and environmental indicators from over 100 countries.

For a copy of the report ($8.50) and the data sheet ($5), both including postage, contact: PRB, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 250, Washington DC 20009, USA. Tel: (+1 202) 483 1100, Fax: (+1 202) 328 3937, Email: prborders@prb.org Discounts are available for bulk purchases.

AUDUBON CAMPAIGN

The National Audubon Society's Population and Habitat Campaign has launched a nationwide effort to expand educational outreach in the United States on population and environment issues. Among the many projects is an active web site: **www.earthnet.net/~popnet**; a new video, *Who's Counting: Population and Habitat for a New Millennium*; and a new children's poster on People and Habitat.

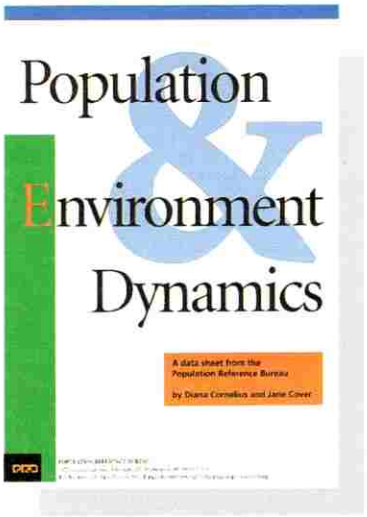
The poster is a combined effort of the population programme and the children's education programme, Audubon Adventures, to produce a colourful and exciting product. On the poster's back is a teacher's guide and activity pages for children. A Spanish version of the poster will shortly be available.

A guidebook, *Population and Habitat in the New Millennium*, has been released for initial distribution to 25,000 citizens. This guide for environmental activists with a special interest in population is based in part on a previous guidebook, *Why Population Matters*, which was co-produced with Population Action International.

The new version emphasises Audubon's approach to the balance between humans and wildlife.

In the coming months, the products of a special project between Audubon, the League of Women Voters Population Coalition and Population Reference Bureau will be distributed. *US in the World* is designed to educate US citizens about their connection with the rest of the world. Some 30 states in the United States have been matched with a specific country. A series of fact sheets compares population growth and natural resources highlighting contrasts and similarities.

For copies of the video ($30 in English only), poster ($5 in English and Spanish) and the guidebook ($9 in English only), send requests to: Penny Sinton, Population & Habitat Campaign, National Audubon Society, 3109 28th Street, Boulder, CO 80301, USA. Tel: (+1 303) 442 2600, Fax: (+1 303) 499 0286.



TURNING POINT

Change and challenge are the two principal themes of a new study from Population Action International (PAI), *Africa's Population Challenge: Accelerating Progress in Reproductive Health*.

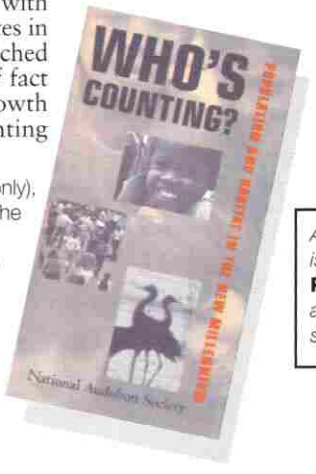
Dramatic changes in governments' policies mean that today two-thirds of countries in the region have active family planning programmes. Change is also evident in a fundamental shift in people's attitudes towards childbearing. Nevertheless, sub-Saharan Africa faces a critical challenge with respect to meeting the reproductive health needs of its rapidly growing population:

- The region is home to 10 per cent of the world's women but accounts for 40 per cent of the world's pregnancy-related deaths.
- The AIDS epidemic has already killed more than four million Africans and an estimated 21 million people are infected with HIV.

The region's projected population growth poses other potential problems:

- African farmers would have to increase production five-fold just to meet the region's basic food needs in the year 2050.
- Even sooner, by 2025, six out of ten Africans are projected to live in countries classified as water scarce, hampering food production and industrialisation.

For a copy of the report contact: PAI, 1120 19th Street NW, Washington DC 20036, USA. Tel: (+1 202) 659 1833, Fax: (+1 202) 293 1795 Email: acalise@popact.org



Associates' News is compiled **Maya Pastakia** *to whom all contributions should be addressed.*

Films

PLIGHT OF THE INNOCENTS

Ruchira Gupta's brilliant documentary, *The Selling Of Innocents* is both shocking and distressing. Winner of the prestigious Emmy Award for the best foreign documentary, the film deals with the sale of young girls in Nepal, most of whom end up in Bombay's infamous Kamathipura brothels.

The film traces the route of sex trafficking, from a small village in Nepal to Kamathipura. It highlights the trauma and plight of a young girl sold into prostitution and the appalling conditions in the brothel.

Sold for R3,000 (US$75), the girl goes through the torture not just of being sexually abused and of being uncared for, she is not given any money for the first five years and is therefore scared to run away. For the next two years she is given only half of what she earns from the madam. Only after that does she get the full amount paid by the customer.

By then she is utterly "burned out". Sometimes the woman has had to service as many as 35 men in a single day.

The documentary is a stark presentation of life in a brothel: a world of overcrowded rooms, filthy surroundings, the daily persecution and torment.

It is to Gupta's credit that she has not only managed to convince the women of Kamathipura to talk to her, but succeeded in filming the real, appalling, conditions in which they live.

"It took me nearly seven months to convince the women in the brothels in Mumbai (Bombay) to talk to me," said Gupta. "They were really scared ... these are women who are often in and out of jail ... and here was I, someone from the outside ... outside of their world of Kamathipura, saying 'I want to photograph you'. So I had to work out a very rigorous consent procedure."

Gupta chose not to approach the women with the help of local politicians, social workers or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or even the police. It was on the footing of an equal relationship that she sought information from the women living in the brothels.

And that led ultimately to a "special bonding" between them. Gupta made it a point, every time any of the women passed on some information about their lives to her, to reciprocate with some information about her personal life, often something very private.

The making of the film itself involved taking many risks. Gupta said she received a number of threatening telephone calls, and, at one time, even faced knives being pulled out at her and the women with her. "Our cars were stoned – often," she added. "And inside the brothels it was terrifying ... once you are inside the brothels, you are in their territory and there is no place you can run to."

In Nepal "we were followed by the police." To show how girls are bought and sold, Gupta actually bought a girl in Nepal. That girl is now in a boarding school in Kathmandu, and Gupta continues to fund her education and stay.

Gupta is currently researching the work of NGOs on sex trafficking and the strategies they adopt to counter this, with funding from the Ford Foundation.

Gagandeep and Tripti Negi

The authors are journalists with the Women's Feature Service in Delhi which provided this review.

The Selling of Innocents for non-commercial use is available in English, Hindi, Nepali and Bengali at Rps 600 (US$100 or £65), plus postage from:
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CARTOON HEROINES

Rivalling Supergirl, Tank Girl and the all-American Wonder Woman for the affections of young girls in today's South Asia, Meena was the first of UNICEF's cartoon heroines. A spirited 10-year-old, with an engaging habit of questioning the received wisdom of her elders – she wants to know why girls are treated differently from boys.

Now in Africa she's finally got a rival. Sara is a 13-year-old African teenager – precocious, defiant and with all the energy and wit of Meena, she and her pet monkey, Juma, are set to challenge Africa's dominant patriarchy.

The inspiration for Meena dates back to 1990 in Prague, where UNICEF held its first animation workshop. The idea was to persuade the participants – from the UNICEF country offices around the world – that they could use animation to get across some of the more difficult child development messages: from vaccination to salt iodization, breast-feeding to oral re-hydration.

Designed to appeal not only to children but also the mothers, aunts, grandmothers and neighbours who sit down to watch cartoons with them, the Meena series has been a great success.

That and hopes for Sara, has led to the creation of a campaign called Cartoons for Children's Rights. UNICEF, has persuaded leading animation studios worldwide, from Disney to Aboriginal Nations, to produce a hundred 30-second spots highlighting children's needs and rights.

Broadcasters are being urged to become Charter Members of the campaign, by committing to air the entire group of public service announcements – available free of charge – over the next two years.

There are five Meena films of which *Dividing the Mango* is a typical example.

Climbing a forbidden tree, Meena picks a mango and brings it home to share with Raju. But her mother gives the lion's share to Raju. "Raju has got more than me!" she protests. "He always gets more, that's the way it is," she's told. "He's a growing boy," agrees her grandmother, "and he works hard." Stung by the implication that she doesn't work hard, Meena challenges Raju to swap chores for a day – and teaches the whole family a lesson.

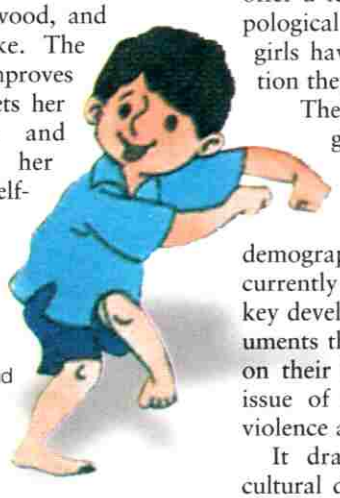
Other titles are *Count Your Chickens, Will Meena Leave School?, The Bully and the Water Melon and Saving a Life.*

The first Sara film, entitled, *Sara The Special Gift*, tells the story of an African girl who is keen to study but because she must help her mother,

brother and selfish uncle, her schoolwork is interrupted.

Collecting wood bundles is especially time-consuming because there is a wood shortage. One day, Sara is told that because her father hasn't sent enough money, her uncle will allow only one child – her younger brother – to attend school.

Sara is heartbroken, but decides to find a way to make her uncle change his mind. Her teacher gives her a book which shows her how to make a stove which uses less firewood, and produces less smoke. The stove she builds improves life in the village, gets her back into school, and ultimately reveals her uncle's greed and self-importance.



Justine Cottle and Jenny Richards

The *Meena* films all run to 14 minutes and are available in Bangla, English, Hindi, Nepali and Urdu and nine other Indian State languages, some episodes have also been dubbed into Chinese, Burmese and Arabic. Produced by Ram Mohan Studios/UNICEF/Fil-Cartoons, they are distributed by:
TVE, Prince Albert Rd, London, NW1 4RZ, UK.
Tel: +44 (0)171 5865526
Fax: +44 (0)171 5864866;
E-mail: tve-dist@tve.org.uk

The *Sara* film runs for 15 minutes. Directed by Neil McKee, it is also available in English and French from TVE.

EDUCATING GIRLS VIDEO OFFER

More than 200 organisations in 50 countries have ordered *People & the Planet* videos.

Now we are offering 50 free copies of our 30-minute video on the education of girls to any of our readers, in English, French or Spanish versions, on a first-come first-served basis. *Learning for Life* tells two stories, from Senegal and Bangladesh, on the life-enhancing effect of education to women and girls who would otherwise have remained illiterate.

In Senegal, where three women out of four cannot read, the film meets village women who have gained confidence and skills from a project which makes learning fun for young women.

In Bangladesh, the film looks at the work of BRAC which has opened 29,000 schools as a lifeline to parents who would otherwise keep their daughters at home.

Send your order for *Learning for Life*, marked Special Offer to TVE at the address below. Please also note that a compilation of all four *People & the Planet* videos is available free, or at low cost, to registered NGOs in developing countries.
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Books

CARRYING THE BURDEN

Burden of Girlhood

Neera Kuckreja Sohoni

Third Party Publishing Company, California, 1995, $19.95

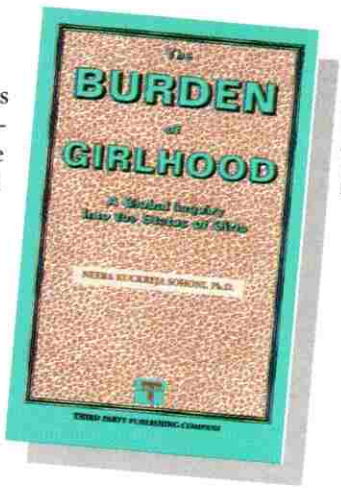
This global inquiry into the status of girls clearly documents their current status and reality. However, it does not offer a feminist, historical or anthropological analysis of why and how girls have come to occupy the position they do.

The book makes the case for girls' rights and for a gender-blind and fair childhood. It is a resource for all those wishing to understand the demography, status and constraints currently experienced by girls in all the key developement sectors. It also documents the impact early marriage has on their lives, alongside the broader issue of individual and institutional violence against girls.

It draws on comparative cross-cultural data to establish the vulnerability of girls and demonstrates that socialisation, culture and the developement process favour boys over girls. The book focuses mainly on the developing world. Whenever possible, however, a comparative perspective from developed countries has been provided.

In its last two chapters, the book offers recommendations and suggestions to make an equitable childhood a reality for girls. It argues that only calculated, concerted, courageous and sustained action by parents, developement practitioners, scholars, religions, national and multinational bodies to protect, nurture and empower girls will ensure a more gender-equitable childhood and adult world for girls. The author proposes global stratgies to move towards gender equity.

The book includes a useful annex that clearly demonstrates gender discrimination at the public policy and family levels and the resultant outcomes at different ages of childhood. National constitutions and global conventions affirm the equality of men and women, but custom, law and practice perpetuate women's inequality.



The book is obviously the outcome of extensive research and review of literature and, despite the paucity of detailed information on girls, the author has suceeded in providing an excellent analysis of the data.

Seema Chauhan

Seema Chauhan is Director of CEDPA's Better Life Options Program for girls and young women operating in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

ALSO AVAILABLE

Improving the Quality of Life for Girls

Kathleen M. Kurz and Cynthia J.Prather

AWID (Washington DC) and UNICEF (New York), 1995, $11.95

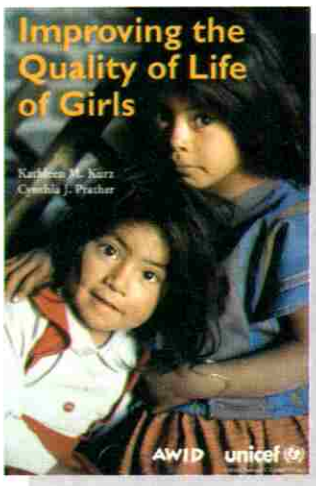
This booklet presents new information on the quality of life for girls in developing countries, especially relating to their health, education and social well-being. It also reviews programme and policy options for overcoming obstacles girls face in their everyday lives.

Action Guide for Girls Education

Susan Groves et al

BAGEN, San Francisco, 1995, $9.95

This guide gives worldwide case studies and personal accounts illustrating the difficulty that girls face in receiving an equitable education. Questions and activities are provided to stimulate thought and discussion. The format encourages readers to develop awareness and stratagies for action in their own communities.



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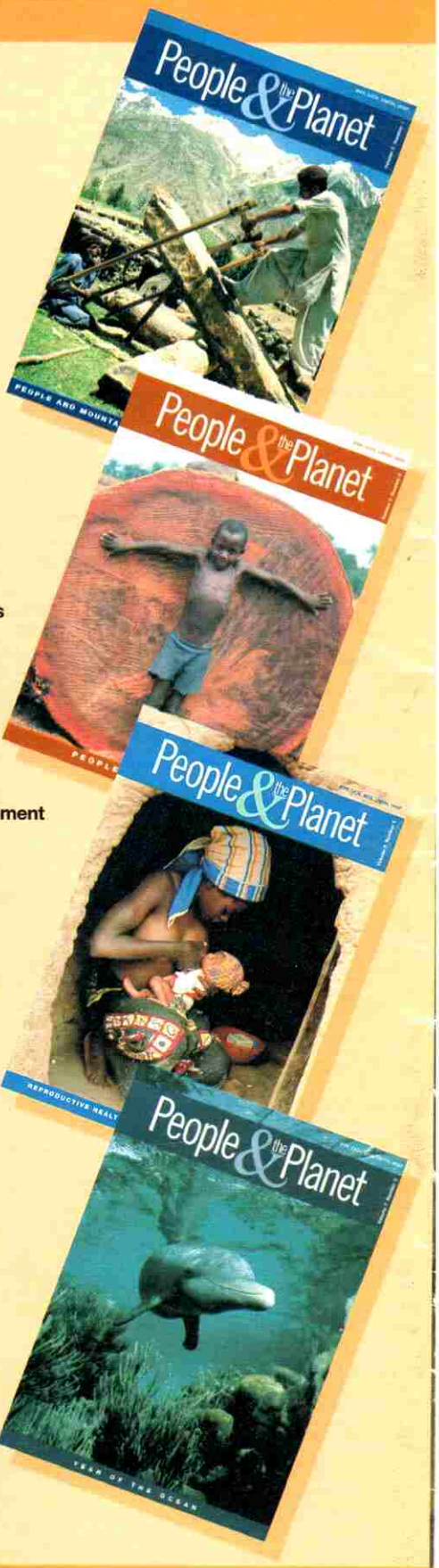

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